MASSTON

A STORY OF
THREE MODERN DAYS

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MASSTON:

A STORY OF THESE MODERN DAYS.

BY

A. J. DUFFIELD

AND

W. H. POLLOCK.

"Some there be that shadows kiss;
Such have but a shadow's bliss:
There be fools alive, I wis,
Silver'd o'er; and so was this."
—*Merchant of Venice*, ii. 9.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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MASSTON:

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CHAPTER I.

So, when my path seems dark and drear,
And when no more your voice can cheer
My failing strength, and when no more
I, struggling through the surf to shore,
Can see far shining in your eyes,
Past where the angry breakers rise
The light that shows me which way lies
The one clear course; and when I think;
Not seeing it, that I must sink,
My soul with sore fatigue down prest
Shall still in thoughts of you find rest.

THE farm called the Hermitage, to which on a memorable occasion Dr. Cumberladge had conveyed Sarah Armstrong, was a dismantled dilapidated place at that time—that is to say, it offered about as many facilities to live in as a spider's web does to the larger and the

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lesser, the painted and the buzzing, flies. There was a certain central part where a limited number of people might find tolerable comfort; the rest was a wilderness, and it was beyond the Doctor's power to subdue to order the chaos which was his inheritance from his ancestors. This chaos had, like that of planets, many elements of brightness and strength, but they had been for a long time floating uncombined in the embrace of fog, for lack of some forming hand to give them shape and comeliness. Soon after, by the Doctor's use of Sarah's misapprehension, her son vanished from her, she longed for some object on which to lavish her love. She had forgotten, or rather had put away from her memory, her father and mother. She had for a time merged her love for them in a new love, which she thought included and glorified her filial love. All the drudgery she had endured at their farm, viewed through the light of this new love, became refined and refining

worship. With what delight did she tell Robert Warner of her home experiences—of the sweet breath of the kine as she milked them—of the yet sweeter breath of the early morning, when, as she fed the poultry, the sun came out and warmed her for the labour of the new-born day. She would tell him, too, of her fancies—of how the flowers kissed each other as they awoke; how from the hedgerows which had been their pillows she saw the wild-flowers rise to deck the day and lighten her tasks; how the birds carolled with her in pure joy, and carried their joy with her morning prayers to heaven. All this did she delight to tell him. And the posy which we have seen her carry to him one evening at the Oxford Works, bore in it, had he but known it, the memory of all these things, and with it his salvation. And Warner, and all those other memories likewise, had been put away.

But after the dream which she finished as

she slept on the shoulder of Trusty, the great dog, who earned a silver collar by shielding her from the cold stones, she woke in the presence of the Doctor and Dame Cumberladge to the first instinct of a new life which was to find its full unfolding in her care of the Hermitage Farm. And upon this ancient place was bestowed the love that was in Sarah Armstrong, and which could not be killed even by the treachery of Robert Warner.

It seemed as if this love gave its own forming life to the gray walls upon which it fell. Like the sun itself it searched out the hidden places in which the damp cold collected. Even the mosses, hitherto smothered in silent tears, burst into flower. It brought to the dark places it visited the remembrance and capacity of pleasure and good cheer, as the presence of a kind nurse brings comfort to the neglected bed of a sick child. Its warmth appeared to arrest decay, but cared most of all to linger on the walls of the old chapel,

once the shrine of saints and the goal of knights, now the home of emptiness and the habitation of weeds.

In this chapel there were niches where stood the Cumberladges of old, who looked down upon her in their stony panoply and by their very stillness seemed to shame the restless turmoil raging near them. There was something reproachful in their silent dignity; something which seemed not so much to regret the wisdom of a past time, as to mourn the folly of the present, insomuch that Dr. Cumberladge, who, although a practical man had in him some inherited tinge of superstition, was loath to enter the chapel in a half light alone; he would say the sightless eyes of the statues looked through him and chilled his bones. But a short while after Sarah had taken the knights under her care, the Doctor strolled into the chapel to find what change she had wrought, and on coming out he met her, and said with one of his meaning smiles—

"Why, Sarah, you have brought the knights to life again."

To which she answered, "Surely not; they have only been forgotten. It is they who have given new life to me."

What Sarah had done for the knights, who of course were the most difficult people to manage, she had done for the rest of the farm —that is, she had given a living, happy, human expression to every abject corner of a dying world.

This the Doctor discovered in due time, and, like the sensible man he was, put his discovery to admirable use. Thus did Sarah Armstrong, in return for the life that the Doctor had restored to her, prepare for him and his a new life in an old home which the stress of life had filled with the triumph of decay.

Pleased but not content with Sarah's handiwork, he would add to it that touch of grace which the artist alone is able to supply, and this touch he thought to find in the handiwork

of Paul Blanchard, who became known to him through his association with Jeavons. Indeed it was as much to know the artist as to obtain his work that the Doctor proposed to Blanchard to come to the farm, to see what could be done with the chapel, and to choose his own day for the visit.

Now there dawned some days in Masston which neither its smoke nor its black mud could sully; and there were some people ill content to live in it, who had left in them so much sympathy with the brightness of nature as made them take delight in these days, and spend them if they could in the green fields instead of in the murky, noisy streets. It was on such a day that Blanchard set out for the Hermitage. To have remained in the hideous den of a town on such a morning would have been as craven as for a prisoner to remain in his sickly cell after the door had been thrown open by his deliverer.

To us who have much love for Blanchard, it

is unpleasant to confess that on this particular morning he had reasons of his own for seeking whatever air and freshness he could. On the day before the month, during which he had promised to Jeavons that he would taste no more spirits, was out, and the result, which was perhaps not unnatural, had followed, Blanchard was at work on a very delicate piece of designing, and found that neither his brain nor his hand would move with the skill and rapidity he desired. And more from instinct than resolve, he attempted to overcome his depression by so drowning it that neither it nor any other human feeling should affect him. In short, he got very drunk. And it was perhaps as much to avoid the shame of meeting Jeavons as for any other reason, that he left Masston the next day. By a coincidence which, although common, is still very strange, as Blanchard walked across the fields to the Hermitage, the Doctor drove into Masston by the road.

It was a restoring walk; the trees were very

dear to him, and the sky which peeped through their branches, and the red and yellow flowers, which stood in the ranks of the grass as officers in fine accoutrements stand among their men. And although he imagined that these superior beings had seen him in his gross stupidities and his helpless vices—his eyes squinting, and his tongue swaying his brain in vulgar mastery—yet he also knew their divine charity. They would not chide; and it was perhaps by their silence that he was won back to their love.

"Is Dr. Cumberladge at home?" the designer asked of a neat maiden who opened the door.

"Master has gone to the town for to bring Mr. Blanchard."

"My name is Blanchard; can you show me the way to the chapel?"

Paul was led across an old-fashioned garden, in which wallflowers and double daisies formed the flowering aristocracy, on the other side of

which, hidden behind a clump of trees, stood the chapel.

"You will find the door open," said the maid, pointing it out to him, and went back to the house.

Blanchard passed through a half-open door, in an ivy-hung porch, and found himself in the presence of the knights.

He had come into an atmosphere of that sweet tranquillity for which his morning's walk had prepared him. Above the heads of the stone Cumberladges hung a series of pictures which not only gladdened his eyes but instructed them. Vivid pictures they were, of trees and sky framed in the chapel windows, from which the stained glass had long since fallen, and these had taken its place. They were the same trees and sky he had seen in his walk, but thus seen they begat in him a desire to know the Artist; and they had for him some special significance, which gave a definite shape to the crowding memories of a time before they

were defiled with the touch of Masston. From beholding the windows his eyes fell to the floor, and from the floor they rose again to the pillars, whose capitals were lost among the cobwebs of the ages, here and there defaced and broken by cruelties which brought the present and the past together with the shock of an outrage. And the people who had wrought this ruin were no more conscious of what they were about, than are two irresponsible forces which meet and clash in a dark hole called a tunnel.

"There's little for me to do here," said Blanchard reflectively, as he looked through the cluster of pillars in the darkest corner of the chapel. From this, as the designer spoke, there seemed to come a gleam of sudden light, which under his gaze resolved itself into a white figure that the sun, which had been overclouded for a moment, greeted with a swift beam falling upon it through one of the ancient windows. As the form advanced towards

Blanchard, who watched its coming with an astonished reverence, he discovered more clearly the face above it.

There are men in whom, for themselves at least, the spirit of prophecy yet survives; who at certain moments are forced by it to say within themselves, "This thing, or person, will influence and alter the course of my life, and of all life, in so far as life shall have any preciousness for me." It is not strange that this should be so. What men call the gift of prophecy, is but the power of being able to concentrate into a momentary space the calculation of cause and effect, which is generally extended over a long time. Blanchard was a man of quick perceptions. In spite of the dulling influence of liquor, which has the same effect on some minds as frost has on window-panes, he had feelers and tentacles in every direction which conveyed to him, with the swiftness of the harp in discovering its music, what common men or others dif-

ferently endowed arrive at only by toil and weariness; and perhaps, in his present mood of reaction, these feelers were in an unusually excited state. Be that as it may: they told him with an insistance he knew to be warranted, that Sarah Armstrong,—for the sweet figure which came from behind the pillars was hers,—would have some potent sway over his being. When she drew near him with the sunlight still caressing her she said—

"You must, I think, be Mr. Blanchard."

Paul bowed in answer.

"The Doctor told me of your coming," she continued, "and I came to take a last look at these pillars, and try to find out why men are so fond of pulling down old things, and replacing them by things which speedily rot or tarnish or rust. I cannot tell you how glad I am to have heard the words you said." She paused, as if expecting some reply, but the designer only raised his eyes to hers, and let them fall again, making a bow, into which he

threw an earnest expression of sympathy, devotion, and obedience.

What could he do, or say? being burdened with the sweetest yoke a man can have laid upon him; his heart full of rapture, and his mind with ecstacy too great for aught but silence? He stood looking at her as a prisoner, watching the sky through his iron bars, regards the little bird which has suddenly alighted on his sill, afraid to move or speak lest he should frighten it away.

Sarah, who saw in Paul's glance that she was understood, continued—

"I have grown to love this chapel very dearly; I have saved it from the disease of decay which threatened it with death; and, as time has gone by, have grown to think—you will say it is only my fancy—that the walls, the pillars, the statues, have some knowledge of me, and some love for the care I have bestowed upon them."

Blanchard looked up again at her, and said,

"I could well imagine it. I have heard from Dr. Cumberladge what this place was once. I see what it is now, and I repeat there is little for me to do here. A piece of pavement, some mason's art to heal the bruise of time, or the ill-usage of men, or swine, anything more would be out of place. As for introducing any new design, or any old design furbished into newness, I could not even dream of it."

"And I had been dreading your coming," said Sarah, "lest you should change the old order that I love."

"No. I am a designer, but in spite of that I have some reverence left for the work of better men than myself. Sooner than restore, as it is miscalled, one of these statues, I would break it to pieces."

Sarah looked at him with gratitude and admiration, and said, "The statues, happily, are out of the reach of idle and cruel hands. They are less hurt than the things nearer the ground."

"Yes," replied Blanchard; "to be above the reach of the touch of cruelty or corruption is safety indeed."

There was a mournful cadence in the voice which caught Sarah's ear; in his attitude there was a dejection which perhaps only a woman's eye can espy in a man—for she only possesses the helping pity that ripens into love—and she seldom sees a trouble or a sorrow but she longs to turn it into joy. Presently she said, "Will you tell me what you think should be done to the pillars, and would you open this window?"

Paul had not observed the blocked-up window, and many another thing had escaped him which Sarah pointed out. Nor did he seem to notice cornice or mullion, moulding or chamfer, when she brought him to them, so occupied was he with her—with the sound of her voice, the motion of her limbs, and the music which appeared to him to come from her whole figure when in repose. Till then he had never seen a woman's lips, or known that even

these portals of love can give forth light as sweet and swift as the glance of an eye. Till then he did not know that all the sweet but silent influences of heaven and earth have their conductors to a man's soul even as the lightning has to the heart of oaks and the centre of rocks.

They went together to talk of ruins, and discuss repairs, and wander through fallen fragments and over dislocated stones carved by human hands, and lo! their speech changed; and they found themselves talking indeed of ruins and of polished stones and of a temple, but one not made with hands.

Sarah spoke much to Paul; but it was of the present—the very present then before them—with no more of the past clinging to it than there clings of the cold green of fruit to its warm and purple ripeness.

Paul, on the other hand, was thrown on his regrets, like a school-boy sent back to pick up his lesson which he has dropped in the play-

ground—a waste of time often attended with tears and shame.

Sarah learnt from what Paul said of himself, and from the nature of his sayings, now timid, now acid, now bold even to laughter, that he had believed much in his own powers to do some good work, and that this belief was passing from him.

"It is too late now," he said with a sigh, too prolonged and deep to be born of the moment. "I see the straight road, and would give much to walk in it. But my feet have too long learned to travel in crooked ways." And half in vexation and half in courtesy he turned abruptly to examine some metal-work on the door near which they stood and said, "I have no right to bring my empty complaints to one whom I have met thus suddenly." He wished to add that in spite of this he felt it easy to open his heart to her as if she were an old friend whom he had discovered after a long and vain search. But

the words lost themselves on their way to his lips.

"If I could help you from any trouble you have," she answered, "I would be glad."

"I fear any one who tried to help me for long, would be dragged into the mud of my own hopelessness. Once my oldest friend came out to meet me in the dark, and brought his lantern, without which we could not find our way through clay and mire, or pass the yawning mouths of old pits, without danger of falling into them. I, being strong in self-will and folly, would do nothing but carry the lantern, and no sooner had I taken it, than I stumbled and fell, and the light went out, when there were two benighted fools instead of one."

"You should unlearn that fear, and you would feel more trust in yourself." He pondered a moment at these words—he had heard them before, but this time they were set to a fresh accompaniment—and he said in a voice

attuned to the new music, "I have one friend who has stuck by me so far, and I must not disappoint him."

"Think," said Sarah, with her thrice-blessed naturalness, "that you have two."

Blanchard's eyes expressed his thanks for these words, his voice dared not. Immediately afterwards he went away, saying, "I must come here again to see the Doctor; shall I see you there, and,"——"hope for further speech, and further love, and strength," he would have said, had he not been stopped by the confusion into which he was plunged, like a horse that is checked by his rider in the middle of a leap.

"I am always here, and most likely I shall see you when you come."

Blanchard then left the chapel, revolving many things in his swift mind which had no place there when he entered it. As he crossed the belt of trees, Sarah looked after him till he was out of sight.

When next she saw Dame Cumberladge, who made some general inquiries regarding Paul Blanchard's visit, Sarah answered that he had most soft brown eyes,—a reply which Dame Cumberladge reported to the Doctor.

CHAPTER II.

"The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
Lets in new lights through chinks that Time has made."
—WALLER.

AMADIS was not more proud in discovering Oriana than was Dr. Cumberladge in finding Sarah Armstrong. It is true that the master passion of the knight was love, that of the Doctor compassion. Both have their martyrdom, also their unfading joys; and he who would reap a harvest of the one, must be prepared to pass through the fires of the other. In many cases the costly benevolence which the good Doctor had poured into the laps of those who turned out to be nothing but worthless wretches, had been returned in nought else than revilings. Even his wife had once been inclined to cast in his teeth the charge of

extravagance and folly, but she had resisted that temptation, and for ever after remained steadfast to her husband in all he did. When the Doctor found his wife loving Sarah Armstrong with a love mixed with admiration and delight, he lost all recollection of the scoffs and jeers and ingratitude which now and then came on him, as come plagues and diseases on those who set themselves to do battle with them, and he even forgot the chagrin and disgust which had followed almost all his efforts to do good to sinful men and faithless women. Ninety-nine of these had told him to his face that they had no need of him; and had gone on prospering in their own way—turning his mercy into what cannot be otherwise called than bestial success. But this one out of the hundred, was worth all the ninety-nine put together; and in Sarah Armstrong, the good Cumberladge found an enduring joy.

And yet he must pay a heavy price for his possession. Full fifteen years had rolled on

since the drizzling night in which the dog Trusty was promised his silver collar for the good service he had done; and there had not come and gone one single day of every year of those fifteen years, but had borne its own most precious fruit of unexpected blessing. The payment for this was to be full ten years of constant daily pain, not only to Dr. Cumberladge, but likewise to his wife.

Sarah had never quitted the Hermitage since the events already recorded. The Cumberladges had made it an occasional resort until the little Cumberladges became numerous, and the Doctor made it a permanent home. The life and soul of this home was Sarah, and she it was who gave it to him, in return for the home he had provided for her, when her own father and mother had forsaken her. Good and strong, and thoroughly healthy as Cumberladge was, he was glad to leave the trickery and shifts, the cruelty and lies, daily enacted before his face in Masston. Why

should he not be likewise swept along by the Masston stream into the same gulf to which it sped? His family had increased—was growing apace, with its needs and cares, and all the fiery trials which make red hot a man's minted coin, so that it can neither stay in his pocket, nor stick to his fingers, and he must go and live there where the earth was a little closer to heaven than it was in Masston.

So he went to the Hermitage; it was the result of an accident after all.

When Sarah's son had proved to Dr. Cumberladge that he intended to live, and gave manifest token of possessing sound limbs and a bright and happy spirit, he was brought from the forest cottage where he had been nurtured, and to which he had been taken immediately after his anonymous appearance in the world, to be a playmate for Master Shirley Cumberladge, a delicate little prince of nearly his own age. The ambition of this five-year-old Cumberladge was to go out into all the world

and kill dragons, and deliver maidens from the hands of monstrous giants who dwelt in castles, whose towers touched the stars. He did this, by lying prone on the hearth-rug all day, reading books, and dreaming of what he had read at night, whether asleep or wide-awake. The consequence was that the child sickened; but his sickness increased when they took away from him his chronicles, and he would inevitably have died if the Doctor his father had not prescribed for him.

The prescription was Sarah's son, who, under the name of Robert Hugh Armitage, became minister of health at the age of six to Shirley Cumberladge. The two children grew up together, slept in the same room together, wore the same style and kind of clothing, read the same books, sat on the same form in the same school, and won equal prizes in all contests.

One day the two boys fought. The boy Hugh, more able than Shirley, had finished his school work, and was busy making a clean

copy of verses he had written to his mother, whose birthday was due on the morrow.

Shirley, in a fit of irritation, or mischief, or both, dropped a blot of ink on to the gold-bordered sheet of paper bought by the poet, and spoilt it. The poet's soul was fired with anger, and he exclaimed in high tones,

"My mother shall know of this."

"She is not your mother," retorted the prince with scorn, and slapped the poet in the face. Then came the fight, and prince and poet most cruelly demonstrated that they were both of them sound in wind and limb, and that the Doctor's prescription for Master Shirley had proved effectual.

"Why, Hugh, what on earth is the matter?" exclaimed Dame Cumberladge, as the boy, with blood on his garments, and fear, mingled with wrath in his eyes, presented himself to her.

"Are you not my mother?" he asked in a troubled voice, and with a tumult in his whole

being as grown men have been known to suffer when they have asked themselves if they were awake or only dreaming.

"My poor boy," was the only reply he received, together with the touch of a friendly hand that pressed his little head against the lady's silk dress.

Then, in the twinkling of an eye, was the whole world filled with misery and pain for one of its children. He had no mother—that is to say, this most loving lady, whose eyes to him were as soft as flowers, whose morning kiss was heaven's dowry, and whose love was his patent of life, was, as his enemy had said, not his mother. But she was the mother of him who had struck him in the face. He had not felt that blow till now. It separated him from all that he possessed, and what was worse, it opened his eyes to the sea of cruelty which he knew not to exist until he found himself in the midst of its awful billows.

Sorrow often brings with it light and wisdom,

even though it be too late to be of other use than to luxuriate in its possession. Sorrow may show us the land of promise in a moment's time, but will not help us to lift one leg before another to enter it. And some light did sorrow bring even to this child; whether a light of life or of death, sorrow could not tell him—it could only urge him to follow it, and he did; and that light led him to a land he knew nothing of and which knew nothing of him. He fled, for he could do nothing else than fly from him who had struck him a blow which had gone to his heart and spilt its warmest blood; and, cruellest of all, had cut him off from her whom he had loved, as one who has a right to love the dearest and best of all human beings.

Then, perhaps, sorrow is a revolving light, which, when it shines on one, turns darkness on to another. For, when Dr. Cumberladge came to know all the day's work, and found that his god-son—the son of his friend—the

son of his own mercy, whom he had designed to be a ministering angel, or an avenging Astræa—had really fled from him into the very same world from which he had rescued his mother, that her son, as it would seem, might only come to the greater grief, such sorrow laid hold of Dr. Cumberladge as only comes to those who are able to discern that it is without remedy or removal.

He discovered, when it was of no use but to torment him, that he had no more right to bring a child into his own home, warm and feed and nurture it, and leave it without provision or right of inheritance, than has a man the right to bring a child into the world and leave it to gain a living by its cries.

Whatever evil shall come on that boy straying away from all that was dear and holy to him, Dr. Cumberladge must share.

Whatever exposure, humiliation, disaster, or punishment ensue, must fall most on him who once left the mother of that boy to perish.

The first trouble fell on the Doctor. He had made himself responsible for this boy. He had voluntarily taken him off his own father's hands, and, certain conditions being fulfilled, that father should never hear a word breathed regarding his unhappy offspring. Those conditions had been strictly and regularly complied with. And yet, in spite of all precaution and providence, here was this son of Sarah Armstrong bringing ten thousand times more trouble on everybody than he could have brought had Dr. Cumberladge not intervened. He had moreover deprived a mother of her child, which as the Doctor himself now knew and declared was nothing else than robbing God. All this, and much more, came out as clear and distinct as fire brings out secret writing. All the good motives, the benevolent aims, and high promises which had guided the saviour of Sarah Armstrong were turned into accusing spirits, which, day and night, pressed on him their disappointments and their

sarcasms as if they had been so many haggard wives asking back their youth and bloom, and cursing him, and alike themselves, for being no longer what they were when they were incapable of anything but pure rapture.

Acting on what he conceived to be his duty, Cumberladge, choking with vexation, proceeded to Mr. R. W. Warner's works to convey the particulars of his son's flight to his father.

If a highly respectable person, a pillar of the church, a friend of the clergy, and acquainted with bishops be told that his early sins are running somewhere about the world, and may at some awful moment—say at a dinner-party, consisting of holy men and holy women, engaged in sipping delightful wines and discussing free grace, or final perseverance—turn up from under the table, clothed in rags and smelling of swine, to claim their prodigal father; surely we ought to sympathise with that person, and hope that his punishment will not be greater than he can bear.

Poor relations are bad enough to those who live on nothing but the renown of riches, but to have execrable vices, damning sins, and monstrous cruelties becoming incarnate, taking well-known forms and importunely claiming holy men, with bishops on their list of friends, and Laffite, Léoville, and Margot clarets in their cellars, as their fathers, must be hell itself. If at one time Dr. Cumberladge dreamed of raising this place of torment for Mr. Robert Warner, he was heartily sorry for it now when he saw that it had become inevitable.

The interview between Dr. Cumberladge and Mr. R. W. Warner was conducted with the utmost decorum. The only one of the two men who suffered any pain from the disclosure which had to be made, and the associations which surrounded it, was the philanthropist.

"The boy never knew his mother, had never heard of his father, his mother believes the boy to be dead; and the only persons with any knowledge of this business are yourself,

your wife, and myself. Is that so?" inquired Warner with great deliberation.

"That is so."

"Do you intend to keep the mother in that ignorance?"

"Most certainly, we have made her life happy. She has no bitter recollections, not a shadow of regret ever passes over her pure mind. She has grown into a refined and beautiful woman, and rules the Hermitage like one born to the right and manner of ruling."

Strange to tell—Warner, who had grown into a refined and handsome man, who ruled the Oxford Works like one born to the right and manner of ruling, who had, moreover, married a most lovely woman, of high birth and great fortune, and belonged to the finest outward show of things the world could boast, did not believe what Dr. Cumberladge said of Sarah Armstrong. He had learnt from the teachers who had brought about his complete regeneration that it was going against God to say of one

who had conducted herself as had Sarah Armstrong, that she had grown into a refined and beautiful woman. It was an insult to Providence; and as for her being happy, he did not believe that either; while it was an evidence as plain as it was painful that, having no bitter recollections or shadows of regret, she must be still in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity. If Mr. Warner had not possessed the honour of an acquaintance with the head of the church, and the privilege of a daily attendance at the throne of grace, he could never have been able to form that clear and decided opinion.

Warner did not convey to Cumberladge the thoughts which passed through his mind.

"In spite of the boy's running away, Dr. Cumberladge, I shall continue the yearly allowance as before. I wish you good morning."

This was a little bitter, but the Doctor bore it like a gentleman who never forgets to be polite to his inferiors.

As for Dame Cumberladge, she never for-

gave herself for what to her appeared palpable deceit, in keeping Sarah in the belief that her boy was dead. And the deceit was not the half of the wrong done; for she had wronged a mother of her right; and a woman who had bought at great price a thing of great joy. As Sarah's boy grew in grace and favour beneath Dame Cumberladge's care, and she saw him rival her own son in capacity and good looks, she wavered still more in her promise to keep Sarah in the dark. But the Doctor held her to it peremptorily. When the flight took place and the boy no more returned, her grief and sorrow increased from day to day, and hastened her removal from Masston to the Hermitage. In the presence of Sarah the stately dame recovered her natural disposition, and found less difficulty in keeping a secret the revelation of which could only have brought a flood of unnecessary and barren sorrow. Why darken the happiness of a new day with useless pain? Besides, if the Cumberladges had then re-

lated all they knew to Sarah, Sarah would on the instant have fled in search of her son, and one great loss would have been followed by another.

The daily anguish for many days together at the first after taking up their abode at the farm, shared between the Doctor and his wife, sprang from the certainty that Dolly or Shirley Cumberladge also, who had been the inseparable companions of the runaway, would so speak to Sarah of the delinquent and the misery he had caused as to awaken inquiry or rouse suspicion, or give place to awkward questioning.

All this did the Doctor and his good and loving wife endure.

But not more steadily did the grass continue its growth, and all the silent processes of nature their operations, without any sign of giving way to the weakness of explanatory speech, than did the young people grow out of all recollection of him who had gone away from them for ever.

It may not be quite true that Dolly had any secret cause to forget her foster brother equal to the cause which made Shirley try to forget him. Be that as it may, no bird ever flew from the nest and became forgotten sooner and more completely than did Hugh Armitage, whose name was never more heard at the Hermitage farm; and if his image brought aught of remembrance to any it was kept in silence.

Of course nothing more was ever heard of that name at the Oxford Works. Hearing, however, is not the only avenue of knowledge open to mortals, as Robert Welsher Warner well knew. When at certain hours of the day the heavy mortgages on the Oxford Works pressed heavily on his soul, he would, by some unaccountable means, get reminded of another kind of mortgage, payment of which might be demanded at an unexpected and unprepared, for time, and that not in money but in spasms, not in any coin of the realm but in fear and torment.

Tormented as Warner was by many fears, it must not be supposed that he was destitute of those private sources of pleasure which give even to money-borrowing men specific reasons for continuing to exist. Warner could not only be generous, he used his generosity as a means to an end—that end being the pleasure of Mr. R. W. Warner. He had long ago discovered that he could do no good thing without feeling proud of it, and becoming fully conscious that it was a good thing; just as if the gods, knowing well the motive of his gifts, hurled them back in his face when he came to offer them. Warner would have liked the heavenly powers to give him their countenance, but as they refused to do so in a strictly private and confidential manner, he soon managed to live without it, albeit he was never indifferent to the slight.

Some days after the meeting of Blanchard and Sarah Armstrong in the Hermitage chapel, Warner, as was his wont, went one morning to

pass a little time in the designer's room. He was as often delighted with Blanchard's sayings as with his designs, and the real laughter in which Warner sometimes indulged was a pleasing intoxication when evoked by Paul. Something approaching to friendship had sprung up between these two men. Not the friendship which is presided over by unseen love, but the trappings and signs of it; or, at most, a well-executed counterfeit. And it is true that in Masston you could even get sovereigns, so like real sovereigns to look at, that they passed for sovereigns for long periods together, and were only found to be base imitations by the merest accident. Warner's friendship was, after all, only Masston produce.

Blanchard found perfect freedom in the service of the master of the Oxford Works; and the master of the Oxford Works reaped great profit and some renown by the labours of the inventor, who, sad to tell, had a soul so proud that he could not even dream of advantage,

any more than a field of corn could dream of flour-mills. Blanchard was pleased with the scope allowed him—he asked for nothing that he did not obtain—expensive tools, costly material, and elaborate experiments, he could always command. The two thus became of mutual use to each other, and each was satisfied with what came in the way of result.

On the morning in question, Warner discovered a moodiness amounting to taciturn sullenness in Blanchard, which alarmed him. Some discontent had seized the goose which for him laid golden eggs, and he set himself to discover the inventor's mind. This required no small tact.

"You are not well to-day, Mr. Blanchard!"

"Yes, I am," was the tart reply; but, recovering himself, and relinquishing his work, at which he continued to gaze vacantly, he proceeded: "But if by 'well' you mean bright as light, and light as air, my blood liquid bliss, and life itself compelling wonder mingled with

rejoicing, then, sir, I am not well, I am indeed very sick. But you, who were never sick as I am, cannot know what I mean."

"Assuredly," said Warner, in his most natural tone, "I know that we all have our dark days, and we can no more help it, or make them bright, than we can make the sun rise earlier than its appointed hour."

"We can help it!" exclaimed Paul with energy, his brow becoming knitted as if clutched with iron fingers. For, being the least selfish of men, living, when at his best, in a world of bright and happy beings, he dared say what was uppermost in his mind, regardless of its effect on persons, though he must have known that at times his words could not but produce much pain, and not unfrequently great aggravation. "It is my own fault," he continued, "that this day finds me in the blackness of despair, when I might have been in possession of a shining hope. I have fitted to myself the garments of vileness, I have been content to

wear other people's rags, because I could not otherwise disguise myself, when disguise for them was necessary, as I also thought it was for me. And now, by God! the vile garments won't come off; the rags I have worn these years have become part of myself. No one knows me. One,"—here Paul's voice, from being deep and harmonious, became broken up into discords. "One—I would give the world if she could know me as well as I know her—cannot come to any adequate knowledge of what I am for the apparel I wear."

This was the kind of outburst which now and then made Warner laugh, but on this occasion there was something in Paul's manner which was provocative of quite other emotion. At first Warner thought the inventor to be drunk, but seeing him standing quite firmly, his eye fixed on some unseen thing, with his cleft chin grasped in the long delicate fingers, which pressed themselves even on Warner's attention, he said to Paul, rather in a business-like tone—

"I should like to know your meaning."

"I mean," was the reply, "that I have changed my being for another than God gave me, and have only just discovered what a thrice accursed fool I am for the trick I have played on myself. I never believed in your water regenerations by face sprinkling, but when you come to baptism by brandy, you won't be long in arriving at conversion to the belief that a man can be born again. Even my face is changed, and that is going to change my heart into an abode of detestable images, made of the bad stuff of my own evil deeds."

"All this is very dark to me," said Warner with a patient smile.

"Of course it is," said the other with moody curtness; "but," he continued, "suppose I were to hold up a glass before your face, in which you could see yourself changed into an object of pity and compassion, or into a thing to be feared first and despised afterwards, what would be your feelings, and what would you

say ? You would say just the very things that I have now said."

Warner became more than interested, and said so.

Blanchard went on, "Had I known that I should ever meet a woman, such as I met only a few days ago, with the chance of making her my wife, I would have been a different man to what I am ; I would have lived a different life. But I dare not think of her—and yet I see her all day, and all night ; and she sees me, and there's a look in her face that beckons me on, which is speedily followed by another which warns me off. Had you not come in just now, I should have gone to drown my thoughts ; but not at the Cu'lwell, no thoughts will ever come to me again that will be fit for any other fate, and when these are all drowned, I suppose I shall drown myself."

Warner's generosity was on the alert. He felt for Blanchard, and what is more, he felt that no ordinary means must be used to recover

him of the distemper in which he then was. He could have given a whole handful of papers full of printed directions, and a new edition of the poems of King David, and even still more precious things, together with glorious old letters written in seraphic fire, or in floods of tears shed by the Christ himself, or said to be so ; and yet these would have had as much effect in Paul's case, as would a piece of adhesive plaster in mending a fractured tea-kettle needed for boiling water. So the latest sample of the good Samaritan went and brought some drawings of a machine that could do everything but think, and the description of a new process for putting a film of copper on to a solid piece of iron. With these the man of trade and commercial religion thought to heal the wounds of love, and hush the wailings of one in immortal pain. Afterwards Warner would carry Blanchard to Baston Hall to pass the evening, under pretence of needing his services there in some matters of taste. For

Warner had great trust in Edith's power to beguile Blanchard from ill courses even into the way of a new life ; the life, on the pleasures of which she could discourse so well. Edith also would be pleased in having something good to do, and an opportunity of exercising her ministering powers.

That evening did Mr. Warner's open carriage convey the proprietor of the Oxford Works and Paul Blanchard though the streets of Masston to Baston Hall ; and no one noticed it with so kindling an eye as did Mr. James Reklaw.

CHAPTER III.

" Marinero soy de amor,
Y en su piélago profundo,
Navego, sin esperanza
De llegar á puerto alguno.
Siguiendo voy á una estrella,
Que desde léjos discubro,
Mas bella y resplandeciente
Que quantos vió Palinuro.
O clara y luciente estrella
En cuya lumbre me apuro !
Al punto que te me encubras,
Serà de mi muerte el punto."

A sailor I on love's deep sea,
My hopes of haven few,
My only guide a single star,
Whose distant light I view—
A star more bright, a finer light
Than Palinurus knew.
O clear and steadfast shining star !
Whose light to me is breath ;
If thou that light should hide from me,
The darkness will be death.

—*Don Quixote*, xliii.

BLANCHARD was well received at the Hall. By Edith because she hoped to obtain some notice

of the progress made by Jeavons with the lower working people in providing them with good food. By Julia because he was the architect of a remarkable bird's cage as big as a church, wherein she kept doves, canaries, sparrows, finches, starlings, wrens, tom-tits, yellow hammers, and parrots. Each bird had his own dwelling and the right to a spacious hall with a floor of clover, and a roof of netting. Julia, who had never seen Paul, ceased not to make inquiries about him ever since Mr. Warner had told her that the constructer of her aviary was the designer to the Oxford Works. His reception was therefore cordial, and his own manners and singular intelligence procured him a consideration from the ladies that would have been deemed flattery by a man of idleness and fashion.

"Let me build a cathedral for the birds," Paul had said when Warner communicated to him his wishes; "and I will so build it that the lady may train them to do anything she likes,

and can have a cage in it for herself, from which she may study the characters of her pets, and treat them as they require.

Warner, who was proud of the conceit, and of the uses to which a thing so common, being made really great, could be put, gave his consent. So Paul made a sketch of the bird palace, and drew out a scheme for a colony of birds that filled the heart of Warner with pride, and the heart of Edith with a mild pleasure as she thought of the sister, whom she loved, finding an occupation that should amuse her and occupy her time in a way that was at least innocent if it was not very useful.

Warner contributed some ideas to this fairy temple, so did Mr. Gadso; even Lord Limethorpe, who knew almost everything, had something to say about the most wonderful bird-house ever heard of. It was built of fine wire with many ornaments of gold and silver, mixed with vermilion and blue bosses; and it approached more to a Chinese than a Gothic

style. It stood in the midst of a clump of trees close to the Hall, and was sheltered beneath the green islands, flung in the air from the arms of a majestic cedar. When all was completed and the birds were installed, the paradise was formally presented to Julia on her twenty-first birthday.

Both Mr. Warner and Edith looked forward to the raptures with which they expected Julia would receive her magnificent gift.

But instead of bounding into the air like a happy chamois, or expressing her surprise and gladness in any original way, she kindly and quietly turned to her sister and said—

"Edith, I will have no more birthdays all my life—now remember;" and she threw her arms round her sister as if to bind her to a promise.

Mr. Warner was a little disappointed that she took no notice of him. But truth to tell, Julia had a slight suspicion that this great industrial exhibition of singers and layers of

eggs, was provided for her as a trap to lure her into habits of usefulness. She grew out of this suspicion in time, and showed some gratitude to Mr. Warner.

Paul had really forgotten all about his magnificent bird's cage; but Julia brought it to his recollection, and after dinner she invited him to see her world of feathered creatures and how she ruled it.

Paul was intensely delighted. The gloom of the morning had gone from his thoughts, and the touch of vanity, which for a moment had polluted his mind, had vanished; for the company of Julia Ascham and her pets inspired him with a happy humour which found vent in praise and unqualified admiration.

Mr. Warner might well be pleased with himself for the service he had done Paul in carrying him to pass the evening at Baston Hall.

"Mr. Blanchard," he said as he and Edith came up to the bird's cage, "I am delighted

to see you yourself again. Let us have no more dull thoughts and useless regrets; the past like the future is in the hand of God alone."

Paul, on whom anything of the flavour of a sermon acted like hot acid on the skin, gave Warner a look that, however well it accorded with Miss Julia's own feelings, somewhat startled and surprised her; for it ill accorded with the estimate she had formed of Paul's gentle character.

"Dull?" she exclaimed in a charming voice. "Surely Mr. Blanchard can never be dull."

"People," answered Paul in deep baritone, "are always dull, I should think, when occupied with nothing but themselves. It is true that this morning Mr. Warner found me in the midst of gloomy thoughts, for I could think of nothing but a waste of years, and myself as a part of a heap of waste."

Edith's discerning ear detected what she thought a fatalist's resignation in Paul's voice

and words. Julia's ear was differently constructed, and in her gaiety and naturalness she exclaimed—

"Why, Mr. Blanchard must be in love!"

"Julia!"

Julia took no heed, but turning as if she were deaf to a highly intelligent starling, who was standing on a round piece of turf suspended from a bracket in the middle aisle of the temple, she said to him—

"Jack, why have you given up singing? You don't even talk now; and yet your beak is of gold, your breast spangled with silver stars, you have all the good things of this life, you have no fear of the naughty place, you are delightfully clothed, and above all these, I love you, and yet these two days you have been as dull, why—really as dull as Mr. Sweetapple. Are you in love?"

Here a gray parrot, with its indented mouth open at the corners, exclaimed in the voice of a duck—

"O Julia!"

At which there was a little comical laughter from birds as well as men.

They strolled away, and Mr. Warner took occasion to tell his wife that Blanchard was no doubt in love, for he had given him so to understand, and that Julia was very quick in these matters.

Edith was pleased, and suggested that, now Mr. Blanchard seemed in better spirits, Mr. Warner might interest himself in his fortunes; perhaps matters of a purely worldly and prudent nature stood in the way of marriage.

"I think Mr. Warner has something to say to you, Mr. Blanchard," said Edith in her winning manner, as she approached Paul, who was strolling in measured steps by the side of Julia—a smile on his face, and his hands behind his back, like one who gives away happy thoughts—or, like one who bestows choice nuts on friends, cracking them, removing the bitter skin from the kernels, and offering

them as delicious food. So Paul joined Mr. Warner, and the ladies returned to the church of the birds.

"Get married, Mr. Blanchard," said Warner. "It will be the making of you."

Paul, who was by no means disconcerted although a little surprised at the friendly advice and the mellow tone in which it was delivered, replied with much simplicity as of one who had no doubt—

"If I ever marry, it will be with one who is as likely to take me for a husband, as it is likely I shall square the circle—or the squirrel in yonder cage discover perpetual motion."

"May I know who the lady is, or what she is like? If there be any obstacle that I can remove, I shall help you with pleasure."

"Who she is is almost as difficult to tell as what she is like; nor does that concern me. I don't know who painted the lady who is dancing in your dining-room."

"Oh, that was Gainsborough."

"It does not matter," replied Paul drily, "although, now I know that a man called Gainsborough fixed, for the world's gaze, in colours so fair, a being so bright and sweet, I shall want to see some more of Gainsborough's works."

"That you shall," returned Warner with decision. "Is the future Mrs. Blanchard like the picture?"

"No; she is more like an apple blossom, to eyes whose only light has been the glare of fire, or like a pillow of hops to a fevered man's brain. She is like a white kitten. She is like a bird whose song is softer than its feathers. She is like a bee, or like the flowers from which the bees suck their honey; or, if she be not like these, she makes you think of these as you hear her speak, and look at her form. She is like no other woman in the world, and yet there is no woman with any delight in her, who is not something like her."

Warner enjoyed Paul's rhapsody, and lis-

tened to it with almost hearty laughter, or what sounded like laughter, being rather of the quality of a cheer, perhaps, than of sympathy, and a thing which rather becomes a patron, than it distinguishes a friend. And he told him to gird up his loins and try his fortune like one determined to win, for win he must.

"She is, I think," answered Paul in a half note voice, "far too happy to think of marrying any one."

"People do not marry to be happy," said Warner; "they as often marry for pride. I believe you could make any woman proud in becoming her husband. How did you meet her?"

"I made the acquaintance of Dr. Cumberladge, through my friend Benjamin Jeavons, who asked me to look at the Chapel of the Hermitage Farm. It is a fine old relic of the past. It only wants a new floor, a door, and a few unimportant repairs to make it"——

Warner had already divined the woman

whom Blanchard loved. He had stopped in his walk to examine the hinge of a gate, which he thought was broken, when Paul also stopped in his answer. There was no broken hinge to look at. Mr. Warner was looking at quite another matter—invisible to human sight. At last he came on to where Paul was standing, having revolved in his practised mind a very weighty matter; which may thus be shaped: "Blanchard is in love with Sarah Armstrong. She may be induced to marry; if that can be brought to pass, one great load is removed from my soul, and another is prevented from being formed. That her boy will, one of these days, return to Masston, I have no doubt; it is as certain as Quarter Day. Blanchard married to Sarah Armstrong means no risk of former things coming to annoy, perplex, and worry Robert W. Warner."

"Mr. Blanchard," he said aloud, with some cheerfulness, mixed with a slight trembling in the sound, "you must marry. Instead of living

from hand to mouth—your days coming and going, and bringing no permanent pleasure, you ought to have a home, and a wife. Let me persuade you to be in earnest. I shall interest myself in your suit. I shall request to be allowed to make a settlement. You have served me nobly and well. I wish to make a return."

Blanchard, who observed nothing unusual in the tone of the master of the Oxford Works, or in the effusiveness of his words, laughed and declared that he neither wanted pushing on nor bribing in the matter of the white kitten.

"I think I will leave you now, sir," said Paul, and was preparing to go when the ladies came up.

"Are you going, Mr. Blanchard? Pray remain to prayers," said Edith, quite good-naturedly, and as if she were offering to the man of ideas a supreme opportunity of enjoying himself.

"Thank you, I wish you all a very good night," and then, turning especially to Julia,

Paul said, "Mr. Warner knows another bird's cage where sings the one bird that ever sang to me." Julia was much pleased. Edith was inclined to be offended; Warner was a little surprised and on his guard, as Paul left them to talk over his eccentricities and betook himself to Summer Lane.

It happened some few weeks after the visit to Baston Hall that one morning, Mr. Warner casually meeting Paul Blanchard, said,—

"Pray, Mr. Blanchard, how may be the white kitten?"

And Paul answered with more fire in his brown eyes than Warner had ever seen there, "The white kitten will one day, tell Miss Julia, skip on my hearth."

At which Warner's face broke into a smile it had not worn for many years. But this, like all other happiness that fell on him, was purely selfish.

CHAPTER IV.

"Our little systems have their day."—*In Memoriam.*

"His worship ever was a Churchman true,
And held in scorn the Methodistic crew."

—CRABBE.

EDITH WARNER had, as we know, proposed to herself in marrying the master of the Oxford Works to become possessed of a power which should enable her to carry out with activity her schemes for bettering this weary planet, or at least that portion of it with which she was immediately concerned. When she went to the theatre with Julia she had been as much impressed by the aspect of the audience as by the force of the actor who compelled their thoughts or rather their feelings, for there were too many who had never found time or occasion for thought. She saw that many kinds of men and women whose pursuits and persua-

sions were utterly at variance, were brought into one and the same frame of attention and emotion by means of words spoken and gestures used in a certain fashion by one man, who in her estimation was a soldier of Satan. And the one thought which occupied her with regard to this man was, that if he had been trained for holy work he might have been a worthy coadjutor of Mr. Gadso. From thinking this, she went on to desire that some force might be employed to bring the many minds of Masston permanently into one reverent attitude regarding heavenly things, as she saw them brought together for the space of a few hours to gape and gaze at things of which the existence was fictitious and air-drawn. The project of uniting the various professors of differing sects or creeds in one mighty effort had long had some kind of unformed existence in her mind, and it now took shape. The grandeur of the idea took possession of her. She said nothing at the time, but the next

evening went to Mr. Gadso, asking him to come and see her at the Hall with Mr. Sweetapple.

When Julia saw these two priests arrive at the door, she said, with great deliberation, that she must go and attend to her birds; and her surprise when Edith, with some alacrity, proposed that they should all accompany her, was not altogether joyful. She led the way in silence and in a discontent which was evident enough to Edith, by the fact of her snatching up to cover her head a distorted sun bonnet for which it was well known that Dodo the gray parrot had a strong hatred not unmixed with terror.

Edith, on their way to the great cage, opened at once upon the two clergymen with the question that was agitating her mind.

"Why should not Church people and Dissenters—I do not mean Jews or Unitarians—you have taught me rightly to divide them—be united together in one army, to meet the

common foe, all animated with one burning, aspiring spirit, with no rivalries"——

"That weaken, or splits that dishonour," said Mr. Sweetapple, wrapping up the sentence with as much neatness as if it had been a skein of silk, and he a mercer's shopman.

"This is no new idea—of course, I received your note," said Mr. Gadso, addressing Edith in a professional, endearing tone, "only it has failed—perhaps from being attempted on too grand and gorgeous a scale. But the elements which divided first the Church at Jerusalem, and, subsequently, the Churches of the West, no longer exist with us. The Jew has long since entered upon his wandering term."

"I asked you to come," said Edith, whose earnestness sometimes landed her near to being rude, "in order to get my own thoughts upon this matter more clearly defined: I mean on details. I have spoken, but in a very slight way, of something of this kind to Lord Lime-

thorpe, who seemed struck with the plan, and at once suggested that you should be consulted. If you think the plan is possible, I will see Lord Limethorpe at once, and we can, I think, together call on the principal dissenting ministers, and arrange a meeting at my husband's works. It was his idea that if such a meeting could take place in the midst of the large population we design to benefit, a strong and lasting impression might be made."

"Of course," answered Mr. Gadso, bowing, and glancing inquiringly at the sky.

By this time they had reached the palace of the birds, where they found Julia, who had gone before them, scolding the grey parrot into a caressing attitude.

"What a charming picture!" said Mr. Gadso.

"Yes," responded Edith quickly; "does not this point directly to our work? Here is the type of that unity among those whose differ-

ences are only in speech and appearance, which we should aim at."

On which Mr. Sweetapple remarked to Julia, with careful selection of phrases, "How good and pleasant a thing it is to see such unity among creatures so different. But that, of course, is due to the sweetness of your sway."

"As for their being different," said Julia, "they are all birds, and the 'sweetness of my sway,'" she added, with a hint of gentle mimicry, "might not keep peace among them unless each kind had its own house."

"But for your guidance, Julia," said Edith, looking at Mr. Gadso, "they would never be able to talk."

"Very few of them can talk," was the reply, "and they only repeat what I teach them."

"Af karse," observed the parrot, in a voice strangely like one that had already made the same remark.

"Julia," said Edith, with some haste, "could

you keep all these birds so successfully unless you had them all under one roof? and do you not think that they like this companionship?"

"And might not the fellowship which is so good for birds, be good, in a higher sense, for Christians?" said Mr. Gadso, with a winning smile, which required a trained intellect, or a very natural lady, to resist.

"I think," said Julia, with more care for what she was saying than was usual with her, "that if these birds, who seem to be so happy, and, also, certainly give me much pleasure, had never been caged, they might have found more happiness after their own fashion. I am certain if their cage were now broken up, and the birds left to themselves, each one would cling to its own bit of wire-work, and die there of helplessness."

"That is not our point," said Mr. Gadso, who could not be at the pains to discover Julia's meaning. "We are speaking of the happy union in which the birds are now living,

and this is precisely what your sister wishes for our fellow-Christians."

"I think," replied Julia, looking up at the starling, who held his head on one side, "that I know more of birds than of Christians."

Upon which Mr. Gadso laughed a laugh of gentle triumph, the meaning of which was readily caught. Edith and Mr. Gadso now stood apart, while the younger priest glided nearer to Julia, and said with an alluring smile—

"These birds are very happy."

Then, moved by a design to share in Julia's pastime, he offered a condescending finger to the grey parrot, who eyed him sideways with a crafty look, and, with great deliberation, took revenge for the affront of Julia's sun-bonnet by snapping the finger in his beak.

Mr. Sweetapple, who was even more terrified than hurt, drew back. The parrot laughed, and Julia, raising herself admonishingly on her toes, said—

"For shame, Dodo."

To which the parrot replied, in a clerical voice—

"Quite so."

"You are a naughty bird," continued Julia, who well knew the strength of her favourite's beak. "How dare you bite people who wish to make friends with you?"

For answer, Dodo flattened his feathers, raised himself to his full height, and danced up and down, without moving his feet, in wicked glee.

"I hope you are not hurt," said Julia to the clergyman.

"Oh dear no," said Mr. Sweetapple, flattening each vowel as it passed through his teeth, and feeling perhaps a little shaken as to the aptness of some of Mr. Gadso's similes.

That day Edith carried out her project of visiting Lord Limethorpe, who was easily charmed into compliance with the spirited undertaking which she proposed. Accordingly,

on the morrow the Lady of Baston and the Lord of Limethorpe raised the standard of religion, and went forth to beat up recruits for the army which they proposed to assemble.

"There can be no doubt," observed the ancient gentleman, as they travelled to the town in a capacious carriage, "that you are right in omitting Unitarians from this scheme, and I almost think you should leave out the Quakers."

Edith, whose toleration went a little further than Lord Limethorpe's, said that she had already made the acquaintance of a distinguished Friend, who had voluntered at once to join in their project. To which Lord Limethorpe, with a tinge of annoyance, answered—

"Oh, very well."

Little more was said until they reached the house of the Rev. Camel Bustler, an Independent minister, to whom some credit must be given for living among the people to whom he preached. Mr. Bustler received his visitors

with what can be best described as a holy insolence—a blow is none the less a blow struck with a bishop's crook than with a bludgeon—which gave some offence to Lord Limethorpe, and but for Edith's tact and earnestness, it is possible that her colleague might have thrown up his commission. Lord Limethorpe had frequently lectured others in the spirit, though not in the manner, of the lecture now addressed to him by Mr. Bustler, and this was no doubt the cause of his irritation. Mr. Bustler was ready to fall into their plans, but reminded them that if any hearty co-operation was to exist between himself and the members of the Establishment, they must meet on an equal footing.

Edith, not knowing on what ticklish ground she stood, explained that this was precisely what she had in view. Had her knowledge of Christian churches been greater, her enthusiasm would have been less. Lord Limethorpe only stared grimly at the ugly portrait of a man

remarkable for nothing but a very wide mouth, which hung over the fire-place. When at last the interview was over, during which all remained standing, the minister dismissed them with a somewhat familiar blessing.

As they went on their way, Lord Limethorpe said to Edith—

"A vulgar fellow that; don't you think so?"

"Consider," said Edith, "the people among whom he lives, and to whom he devotes himself."

"I hope," returned her companion drily, "that we may find a little more gentleness in the next man we visit."

"He," said Edith, consulting her tablets, "is a Wesleyan, the Rev. Newton Snape, and I think we are close to his door."

In effect, the carriage stopped at this moment, in front of a modest, or what was made to look like a modest house, whose whitened step leading to the black painted door, which stood between two windows, hung

with fine muslin, gave to it a widowed expression of front. The door was opened by Mrs. Snape, who was apparelled in the same fashion as her dwelling, and she greeted the expected visitors with much cordiality. Mr. Snape, to whom they were presently introduced, was a man with whom preaching evidently agreed, and he looked as if he had never been guilty of a single act of backsliding, which he did not fail to remember in his acts of daily thanksgiving.

The meeting was much more agreeable than that with Mr. Bustler, but Lord Limethorpe was greatly exercised in trying to unriddle the mystery of Mr. Snape's content. The minister's talk was unassuming and practical, like the tray of cake and wine which Mrs. Snape, with primitive courtesy, brought in.

Lord Limethorpe, with profound politeness, assured Mrs. Snape that he never drank wine before dinner.

"Really," answered the gentle mother in Israel, "we never drink wine at all at dinner; this is cowslip, will you not partake?"

Lord Limethorpe, with fresh expressions of gratitude, took the small glass, directed the conversation to Mr. Snape's labours, and, in a moment of abstraction, placed the wine on the mantlepiece, and left it there.

When they reached the carriage again he said to Edith, in the tone of one who had seen a vision—

"I shall continue to think that people have just as much right to leave the Church, and set up a new worship, as they have to make cowslip wine." And in that the noble lord was doubtless expressing tolerance which would have satisfied Milton himself, but he was unconscious of it.

Other visits followed which need not be described, and while Edith was rewarded for the fatigue of the day by a marked unanimity in the acceptance of her plans,

Lord Limethorpe was rewarded by the gratitude of Edith.

It should be stated that more than once the kind-hearted nobleman was strangely moved as he found himself during their visits for the first time in close contact with a force which much resembled satire, not the cold-hearted satire which withers or repels, but that soft and summer breath which has been said to pass the power of storms. One instance will suffice. They called on a man whom they found working at his trade in his own house, who was, nevertheless, one of the leading preachers in Masston—but whose views were peculiar; for he used to say that rather than take money for preaching he would pay something for the privilege, and after telling Lord Limethorpe that his lordship did not know what he was talking about, he commenced to quote the following lines from our great epic:—

"The Great Architect
Did wisely to conceal, and not divulge
His secrets, to be scanned by them who ought

Rather admire ; or if they list to try
Conjecture, He His fabric of the heavens
Hath left to their disputes, perhaps to move
His laughter at their quaint opinions wide
Hereafter. When they come to model heaven,
And calculate the stars, how they will wield
The mighty frame—how build, unbuild, contrive
To save appearances—how gird the sphere
With centric and eccentric scribbled o'er
Cycle, and epicycle, orb in orb."

Lord Limethorpe, who had never heard these lines before, and thought that the little man who had quoted them must be mad, conceived so great a dislike and disgust to the whole fabric of dissent and what he judges to be its greatest crime, that he said to the eccentric preacher in an arrogant tone: "The man or the people, or the system, that can represent the Almighty as one capable of laughing at the ignorance of His own children, or as contriving His works to contribute to His amusement at their expense, can only be bad, and do bad," and he left the house abruptly, leaving Edith to follow him.

The little workman-preacher laughed most

heartily, and Edith, who shook hands with him, was glad to get away.

That evening Lord Limethorpe sat over his solitary wine thinking over the events of the day, and could compare the part he had played to nothing else than that of a low electioneering agent. He rang the bell for prayers, which was answered by a troop of well-trained, handsome servants, perfectly modest in their demeanour, and looking as if they were being trained for some saintly calling; the good old lord was his own chaplain, and the last thought which occupied his reverent mind was one which did honour to his good-nature. Recalling the lines from Milton which the working-preacher had quoted in the morning, he went to sleep with the firm resolve of never doubting that God Almighty was a gentleman.

CHAPTER V.

"Good the more communicated the more abundant grows."
—*Paradise Lost.*

The larger and the lesser stars move in equal harmony. The wheel of a barrow which carries homely fruits and herbs to market, and the wheels of the gilt coach which conveys the Lord Mayor to the palace, obey the same laws; therefore it should cause us no surprise to hear that, while the plans of Edith for uniting the religious people of Masston to each other, and all to heaven, had met with great success, the less ambitious aims of Benjamin Jeavons to sweeten the earth for some of its most wretched children, were crowned with happy results.

Edith, too, had her sublunary charities, as we have seen already, in the regulation of female labour at the Oxford Works. It was

likewise through her influence that the wives of such workmen, who so willed it, received their husband's wages at two o'clock on Saturday afternoons. On the very first Saturday afternoon after the visit of the Masses to the courts of Lear and Macbeth, introduced to their Majesties by Paul Blanchard and Benjamin Jeavons, the latter received at least fifty ladies at his provision shop, who were anxious to exchange their market money for such necessaries of life as he undertook to supply. Nor did Jeavons close his store that night until a very late hour; for not only had he to weigh out butter and sugar, count eggs, reach down bread, cut up bacon, and divide cheese, he had also to use much explanatory speech, in unfolding his method of business, and how he and his customers were to benefit thereby. The more simple and clear his statements, the more had he to enlarge in commentary. So accustomed had these people been to the taste of adulterated food, that it not only corrupted and de-

based their tastes, it darkened their reasoning powers, and it required a multitude of words, many times repeated, to enable them to apprehend the meaning and bearing of two or three words of weight. The plainness of Jeavons' shop, the singularity of his proceedings, the order in which things were kept, all struck upon the beholder's senses as something uncommon and therefore suspicious. Everything purchased likewise had to be entered in a ledger, and each buyer received a small memorandum book, in which was set down the amount of money laid out. Jeavons explained this proceeding as follows :—"If you buy the same amount of provisions next week, you will have paid for your admission to the theatre; and if you go on buying for twenty-five weeks longer, each week to the same amount, I shall then have the pleasure of paying you back thirty shillings; and if you go on in like manner to the end of the year, you will then receive a little more than three sovereigns."

How some of the poor women laughed in derision, how others smiled with a dubious shake of the head, and some begged that he would take care and not hurt himself, for that the things they bought were cheaper and better than they had ever bought before, need not to be set down here. On the following Saturday the shop in Summer Lane could not contain the crowd which gathered there, large numbers had to wait outside ; all came with their market baskets, to carry away the things whose quality had carried their own good fame into many a household. It had even got bruited about that by buying their weekly provisions at Mr. Jeavons' shop they could pay their weekly rent ; a thing which looked like magic, for it was beyond all understanding. Good Mrs. Ruckles, who was one of the first customers, being a woman of quick and comprehensive charity, seeing how hard pressed Mr. Jeavons was for help, offered to serve out the potatoes.

"Very well," was the reply, "but I must pay

you for your labour; if you can spare me three hours of your time, I will spare you a pound of the finest butter you ever tasted."

"But I don't want nothing; let me do it for love?"

"You can do it for love, and the butter as well," said Jeavons, very busy with other ladies, his face keeping a serene but good-natured expression, which conveyed an idea of helpfulness, truth, and honesty, mixed with a determination that could not be trifled with.

The famous stenographer, who had stolen the parson's sermon, was also on duty, doing the writing, that is, entering the things sold in one book, and the amount of money laid out in the memorandum book of the buyers. Tom would also be paid in kind for his labours. Thus, without their knowing it, some of the dreams of the reformers of society were being worked out in Jeavons' little shop, and more than one ancient practice, which the advance of civilisation has obliterated from the world, was

restored in one of its neglected corners, to the great profit and blessing of many people who, up to this time, had lost all trace of happiness, and who never enjoyed one poor chance of an exchange of helpful sympathy with a single human being.

The effect on Jeavons himself, was greater than any produced on his customers. The fountains of his heart, hitherto closed, or, at best, only occasionally set flowing, were broken up : his customers became his personal friends, their profits made profit for him ;—the love with which Mrs. Ruckles worked, mixed with Sarah Armstrong's butter, was not more sweet and fresh than the pure joy which welled up in Jeavons' soul, as he saw the steady progress of his labours, and out of the triumph he had won over imposture and lies, and the meanest form of thieving, there came into what had hitherto been a very practical life, a gleam of poetical feeling.

Within the space of only a few months, he

had to pull down his barns, and built greater, but without any thought of taking his ease: he was compelled to take more spacious premises, and he opened another and larger shop in the centre of the town, and there the crowds of consumers of bread and bacon still pressed in, for the simple reason that there they could procure better food and more pleasant things than elsewhere, also more just measure and exact weight.

"Why, Benjamin," said Dr. Cumberladge, as that kind-hearted, but now somewhat subdued, old gentleman entered the new premises one morning, "you will become a great man yet, you see."

Jeavons, who well enough remembered what the Doctor had said on that subject some time before, replied that he did not think so. But that if the Doctor meant by a great man, a man happy and blessed with some content, then he was a great man already.

"Benjamin," answered the Doctor with great

deliberation, and with much feeling, "it is an awful thing to be happy."

"Yes, and there is a kind of happiness which we are able to bear only at times, and at long intervals; but, I think, sir, that many men are unhappy, because they undertake to do too much, or what is beyond their strength. I know it was so in my case. Then again, how much happiness is lost by not doing the very simple things which require to be done every day. We get proud; and ill-content to do things that are as easy as winding up a clock; and yet, if we did not wind up the clock, we should never know the time of day."

"I dare say you are right, Benjamin," said the Doctor with a sigh. "After all, it is not the little or the much that occupies us:

> 'Many things perplex,
> With motions, checks, and counterchecks.'

I sometimes wish that it were time to die."

"And I," replied Benjamin, regardless of, or not heeding the sorrowful sighing of his friend,

"am only just beginning to discover what a fine thing it is to live."

"How did you find out that riddle, my good friend?" inquired Dr. Cumberladge, with a newly-awakened interest.

"Just by opening my eyes," returned the other. "Within the past few weeks I have seen many human beings, who were fast bound in misery and iron, take heart and hope again, and the sight not only helped and refreshed —it remade me.

> 'In that hour,
> From out my sullen heart a power
> Broke like the rainbow from the shower.'"

"I see, Benjamin, that we have both been reading the new poet, which is a delightful compliment fate seldom allows her subjects to enjoy together. Do you believe in the 'hidden hope' on which he discourses?"

"I believe in the Æolian harp," was the reply, "for I have heard it," remarked Benjamin with unaffected meekness.

"'And feel, although no tongue can prove
That every cloud that spreads above
And veileth love itself is love.'"

"Is that so?" inquired the Doctor recovering a little some of his wonted good-nature.

"That is precisely so," answered Jeavons with earnestness, and continued—

"'Forth into the fields I went,
And Nature's living motion lent
The pulse of hope to discontent.'"

"This is very remarkable!" exclaimed the Doctor cheerfully. "I came here for an account which lies between you and my friend Sarah Armstrong, and I find that, like her, you are much more eager to talk poetry than settle the price of butter. Pray, did you get this new book from her, or did she receive it from you?"

"I believe that she received it from my friend Paul Blanchard. He and I first read it together, and then he carried it to the Hermitage. It is a very wonderful book. It has already, to my knowledge, turned several apes into men."

"And to my knowledge," mused the Doctor, "it has made a most charming woman talk like an angel."

"I wonder," inquired Jeavons, in a general way, as if it did not much matter, and who saw the Doctor relapse into a brown study, "I wonder if the poet knew that his words had transformed apes into men, and women into angels, it would make him very proud or very happy?"

"It would unquestionably make him both proud and happy," said Cumberladge, whose tone had changed a little from sadness into what might be called an echo of pleasure—as if before he had smelled nought but the mould in which grew the rose, and now, like another poet he was fond of, he smelled the rose above the mould. "I know it by experience. By the way, is not Sarah Armstrong a connection of yours?" inquired he, casting a sudden and searching glance at Jeavons.

"A distant connection," was the reply,

"Sarah's father and my father were cousins." There arose a slight blush on Jeavons' face, the cause and meaning of which the Doctor was anxious to know, and accordingly set himself to discover.

"How, might I ask, is it that you never cared sufficiently for her as to make inquiries about her after you found that she had left her home so suddenly?"

"I never heard of it till many years afterwards; and, when her mother died, it was then the old man, her father, told me of it, with much and bitter sorrow; and that she had gone away because of some hard words they had given her, and that she had come to Masston. But I never heard of her. I did make many inquiries, but without any result, and never heard her name until you mentioned it some time ago, when you told me she was a friend of yours."

"And not then," remarked the keen-eyed Doctor, "did you ask any questions."

Jeavons still felt a slight tinge of shame, and it expressed itself in his face. For, what the Doctor said was true, although the construction which the saviour of Sarah Armstrong placed upon the expression on Benjamin's countenance was wrong. He might have told Dr. Cumberladge that he once loved Sarah Armstrong, and for her had suffered the first and only pangs of love, but that one, whom he despised, coming between him and her, and so ousting him from the lists, had chilled his heart towards her, and changed what might have ripened into the passion of love into a commonplace feeling of quite another kind; but he was too proud for such confessions, and he remained silent.

"Do you know nothing of her?" demanded the Doctor. "Did her father never tell you explicitly why his daughter left her home?"

"Her father died in my arms," was the reply. "His last last words were 'Sary, Sary, come thee ways back again home.' And

so he died. He never spoke after that, and I never heard anything of Sarah."

"Would you not like to see her?"

"She would not care for me, and I suppose we should not know each other now," said Benjamin, a trifle disconcerted.

The Doctor, convinced that Jeavons knew nothing of Sarah's story, resolved upon going a step farther, and said, "I never turned an ape into a man, Benjamin, but I believe that I saved Sarah Armstrong from a cruel death—and, let me tell you, that the only house in which she ever slept after leaving her own home was mine—the only home she has ever known since then is the Hermitage Farm, and, on her account, I know what it is to be both proud and happy. Let me see," he continued, changing his tone and taking out a note-book, "you owe to Mistress Sarah Armstrong £26, 13s. for butter. Is that correct?"

"It is a little more than that, I think," said Benjamin, proceeding to examine his journal.

"Very well, you must pay up. I will certainly take no less, and as much more as you like. How much may your buttership have made by way of profit?"

"Exactly £2, 1s. 8d.," replied the reader of Tennyson, and vendor of genuine butter.

"That is hardly enough," remarked the Doctor in an inquisitive tone.

"It is enough for me. You know, sir, I provide some profit for the buyers."

"If you don't take care you will have the big dealers down upon you, for spoiling their trade. By the way, what a rare fellow your friend Blanchard is, I believe he is deeply in love with Sarah."

"So I gather from Paul," said Benjamin in a neutral tone. "Do you think she cares for him?"

"That," replied the Doctor good-naturedly, "will depend on me. She will do nothing without my consent. What we shall do when we lose her I cannot begin to guess. I dread

to think of it. All I can say at present is, that I will not stand in the way of Sarah's happiness. Will you come to the wedding if we ask you ?"

"I would walk there in bare feet, if the way were paved with flints."

"No, no," said the Doctor, feeling the taste of a forgotten joy; "you shall come in her father's shoes. But I must say good-bye now, or I shall be late for dinner." And Dr. Cumberladge left Benjamin Jeavons' shop with a much lighter heart than when he entered it.

CHAPTER VI.

"There have been men whom even vulgar and tavern music, which makes one man merry and another mad, strikes in them a deep fit of devotion, and a profound contemplation of the First Composer."

—*Religio Medici.*

While Edith and Jeavons went on, carrying out their different schemes of benevolence, the one for supplying the helpless people of Masston with wholesome food, and the other for curing their souls, and both were more or less contented with a work that, after all, would probably amount to sprinkling a house on fire with a watering-pot, or at best the rushing of a rapid river into the proud and careless ocean, Paul Blanchard was raised to happiness far higher than theirs by the discovery of a new world. He had asked Warner to let Julia know that the white kitten would one day

skip on his hearth; a request whose daring could only spring from the illumination of his whole being. He was like the heroes of fairy tales, whose bear-skins at a magic touch drop off to reveal the prince beneath: for, from the fact that he was not despised by the woman whom he felt to be far above him, he had learnt that his gracelessness was not wilful, and his wickedness only skin deep. From the day when he first saw Sarah, he had felt bound to convey his new self to her who was its author. He made many visits to the Hermitage Chapel, and every interview with her gave him at once the desire and the power to become, in his own mind, more worthy to approach her. He felt like one who escapes from the streets and alleys of a cramped life, into the summer of the world; like one who has been torn with pain, and now is soothed with the rocking of the waves, that bear him further and further into the sunlight. All this did he feel, and yet found no words to tell it to the woman whose existence was a

revelation to him. At length one day he left Masston burdened with intention, and laid his burden at the feet of Sarah.

"I love you," he said.

Sarah drew suddenly back from him. There was no rejection to be learned from her face, but there was an alarm in her look and action which filled Paul with amazement.

"You do not repulse me?" he cried passionately.

"I said," answered Sarah with some agitation, "I would be your friend."

"But I," said Paul, "love you and would be your husband." He took her hand; the trees bowed gently through the windows; the knights looked down approvingly; and a glad light streamed through the ivy porch, as Doctor Cumberladge strolled into the chapel.

"Good morning, Mr. Blanchard," he said in a welcoming voice. "Are you going away, Sarah?"

"Yes," she answered, and went quickly towards the house.

Before Paul, who looked anxiously after her, could give any voice to his contending feelings, the Doctor said—

"So you don't think there is much to be done to the chapel?"

To which Paul answered with audacity, "There is nothing in the chapel now."

"So you think—so you think," remarked the Doctor regarding Paul attentively.

"I am sure," said Blanchard, "that the only way to restore this lordly old ruin, will be to turn it to some happy use."

"Stop!" exclaimed the Doctor, "we must speak of this."

"I don't want to do anything else," replied Blanchard, opening wide his hands, and putting himself erect as if to court the most searching inquisition.

"Of course, I know," continued the Doctor, beginning to walk up and down with his stick

grasped behind his back, "that you have been making love to my dear friend Sarah Armstrong."

"I am glad that you know it," said Paul; "and if my telling you, what I have already told to her, will help me, I will ask you to do for me what you can."

"Ha, hum," said the Doctor; "you know my friend Jeavons, I believe. He could tell you much of Sarah, and no doubt he has."

"I don't want anybody to tell me anything," said Paul; "I know Jeavons, I am glad to say, well enough, but I have never asked him anything on this matter, and he has never told me, although he knows of my coming, and why I come here."

"Nevertheless," said the Doctor, "it is necessary that you should know something which I alone can tell you. I assumed the charge of my friend Sarah's happiness, and I must fulfil a duty to her as well as to you."

The Doctor, schooling Blanchard to silence with an imposing gesture, proceeded to say—"I would rather sever this arm from my body than that any pain should come to my friend. She has had enough already, which she has outlived. She is perfectly happy with us, and I will not allow the past to overtake her."

The Doctor then told Sarah's story as he knew it, suppressing only Warner's name and all clue to it, and said—

"Now, you know all. Act for yourself. I will promise you no help, nor will I be any obstacle. I have discharged my duty to you, but ask me any question you like. Will you come in now and see my wife? lunch will be about ready."

Blanchard, whose old sins came back in a new light to him after hearing the Doctor's recital, felt his passion, if subdued, deepened. His attitude might well be mistaken by the friend of Sarah, who saw his drooping head,

but did not know that Paul was then discovering the full meaning for him of words he had pondered before,—

> "That men may rise on stepping stones,
> Of their dead selves to higher things."

Presently he raised his head and said with some emotion—

"I shall be glad to see Mistress Cumberladge, of whom I have heard so much."

They went inside the house, where Paul found not only Dame Cumberladge, who received him like a gracious queen bestowing a boon, but Sarah Armstrong, seated by her side. In front of Sarah sat Dolly Cumberladge, much like her mother in the fulness of her quiet gaze and the grace of her person, but really more like her father in the quality of her mind, and in the decision of her character. Shirley Cumberladge, the son of his mother, and like her in all things, stood behind Sarah's chair, and brother and sister seemed to make of themselves two guards, prepared to

lose their lives in defence of one whom they both loved.

As they sat together at lunch, Paul ventured on the suggestion that Shirley would become a doctor after his father's example.

"He would rather be a knight," said Dolly, "but then, as he says, there's no work for knights to do now."

"I know some knights," said Paul, looking at Sarah, "but they are dead ones, who have done some good work lately."

"Those must be the knights in the chapel," said Dolly with a laugh.

"Mr. Blanchard," remarked the Doctor, "must be a poet; he has fantastic whims about these old knights; and, I confess, without claiming to be a poet, so have I. At times their stony eyes chill me so that I grow stiff and motionless, and stone looks on stone."

"How different we all are," said Sarah, looking steadfastly at the needlework in her hand. "The first time I saw these knights, they

carried me back to very early days, when I read the story of Mr. Greatheart, and the more we have cleaned away the rubbish from the chapel and got more light, the greater likeness do I see between all these knights and that bright and shining one. He might have been a Cumberladge, I think."

"Then you still believe in your Mr. Greatheart being a real person," said Dolly.

"Do not you?" asked Sarah.

"No," said Shirley, "Dolly has lost such beliefs, since she took to reading a different kind of novel."

"Do you read novels, Miss Cumberladge?" inquired Paul.

"I have sat up all night reading novels," was the answer, "but that was when I was very young."

"And now that you are an old woman of three-and-twenty," said the Doctor, "you have given up such vain things?"

"No, father, I have not given them up. I

should be glad to read even the story of my own life put into a novel, only it would have to be as true and beautiful as a portrait by Sir Joshua."

"I had long had a notion," said Paul, turning his words in Sarah's direction, "that we get our taste for novels from the early use of looking-glasses, and now I am convinced that this is true," on which there was some pleasant laughter.

"How these two children of mine," observed the Doctor, "ever took up the reading of romances is a painful mystery to me."

"Oh!" said Dolly, "why did you not tell me this before, I could have cleared up the mystery years ago. It came from"——

"Stop!" cried the Doctor, "do not tell me. There is nothing I like better than to keep a mystery on hand which I know I can solve when I will."

At that very minute a boy's figure crossed the landscape, in that part at which Dolly was gazing. She saw this figure at play with her

little brother Shirley. At the same moment Dame Cumberladge heard a child's voice say, "Are you not my mother?"

"When I was a boy," said Paul, in mysterious sympathy with these unbidden thoughts, "books did not come to me, nor was I taken to them. My eyes caught the shapes of things on hedges and in trees, and I shall never forget the first time that I saw the eye of an apple?"

"Do you not mean the apple of an eye?" inquired Dolly, who had a playful furtive glance for everything.

"No," said Paul, amidst much laughter, "I mean the thing opposite to the apple's tail."

"This proves again," said Sarah, who was fond of such simple talk, "what I said about the different impressions people get from the same thing. I am sure I never looked at an apple's eye."

"And pray what did you see in it?" inquired Miss Dolly.

"I saw a star," answered Paul.

Sarah and the rest glanced at him, but saw nothing in his face that answered to his thoughts.

"A star," he went on in a very practical tone, "of which thousands are now made at the Oxford Works every week in brass. And the apple's eye was the beginning of my being Mr. Robert Warner's chief designer."

The Doctor looked at Sarah when Warner's name was spoken, but saw in her no trace of a recollection that the name was once dear to her. And Dame Cumberladge raised her eyes which met Sarah's in a glance of perfect calmness and repose. Nor was there a tremor in Sarah's voice as she said to Paul, "And did you learn nothing from the apple itself?"

"I learned," said Paul, "to love many things which recall to me the apple's beauty."

"Why, this," said Dolly, "is almost as nice as a novel."

"Come," said the Doctor, "we have had enough of novels; let us go for a walk."

They passed into the fields, Sarah and Dame Cumberladge together, Dolly kept close to her father, with Paul and Shirley accompanying them. Presently, as they passed along the hedgerows, they came upon clusters of ferns, which apparently no one had planted and certainly no one regarded; their dry curled fronds giving them an expression of heedlessness for any company save their own. But in spite of their dryness and indifference, there were eyes which were accustomed to regard and to find in them much beauty and some use.

"If everything," said Paul, breaking away from the Doctor to join the Dame and Sarah, "had its reward in this world, these ferns should have a number of pounds sterling, which I have kept for myself. But since they will not, or cannot, share their profits with me, as a reward, let me do them an honour they will prize more."

So saying he cut off their heads and presented them to Sarah.

"What!" cried Dolly, "is this the way you reward your friends?"

"Of course," said Paul in his fullest voice; "what better fate could I wish them?"

"There are plenty of precedents," said the Doctor.

"How very clean," said Sarah, "ferns always are; they are beautiful when alive, but more beautiful when dead."

"I don't know," said the Doctor in a youthful voice, "which I would rather have," and here he took Dolly round the waist as if he were her lover; "a quantity of lovely things to look at—or a mind that sees loveliness in everything it sees."

"I believe that Sarah," said Dolly, "could even find something nice to look at in a pigsty."

"That is not very difficult," said Sarah; "four little pigs' noses, clean and bright, tossing them-

selves at you, as if asking for something which you can only give them, make a very pleasant sight."

"If you go on at this rate," said Dame Cumberladge with her accustomed sweetness, "we cannot tell how much we may learn by looking at things afresh."

"Stars in the calix of an apple," said Shirley, "gold in dead ferns, prettiness in pigs' noses."

"And," quoted the Doctor in his didactic vein, "good in everything."

As they continued their stroll over the buttercups, it seemed that they belonged all to one family, and that one spirit ruled them all.

Late that evening Paul left the Hermitage Farm, whither he was to return next day, through a darkness which brought him much pleasure; in it was there no sadness, and no fear, only the rest that was needed for the strength and splendour of life, which he knew would come. And that pleasure was increased as, passing under the sombre silent boughs

which overarched his path, he felt that he could tell them a story of gladness which they knew not yet. As the lights of Masston came into view, he looked back on a soft darkness, sorry to leave it for the vulgar certainty of the glare that lighted the restless night of the town.

While this palmer passed through the streets of Masston, careless now of their vulgar and tavern music which had once attracted him to madness, there came towards him another pilgrim who bore a thyrsus rather than a palm; who was as much in love as Paul was, and on whose ears the clishmaclaver of the streets fell equally unheeded. This second lover had one advantage over Paul Blanchard in knowing that his love would be returned; the object of it being none other than the delicate self known by the name of Lord Francis Elbston, cousin of Lord Limethorpe, who was the friend of Mr. John Buckle, and with him the real origin of the Oxford Works. If the pious

creditors of the master of that famous manufactory, to whom the stability and excellence of Robert Warner were things as instinctively known as their own wealth, could have guessed that under their windows there was passing, with a jaunty step, a young man who might at any time turn their treasure to dust, their sleep might have been troubled, or their thoughts perforce diverted to laying up some sort of treasure which thieves could not steal. For it often happens that when a man has failed in making a profit out of both worlds, he betakes himself eagerly to drawing cheques which can be dishonoured only by his own want of faith in the security. With such reflections as these, however, Lord Francis was the last person to be disturbed. He had ever a confidence in his own resources, or rather in the provision of resources made for him by others, which had helped him successfully through a sea of trouble that must have swamped any one weighted with thought or care of consequence.

Upon this sea his daring emptiness had safely floated him.

It becomes necessary to recall the circumstances of Lord Francis's connection with Warner.

Up to the time of his flight from England, compelled by the discreditable transaction already referred to, Mr. John Buckle, the possessor by inheritance of the business which afterwards grew into the Oxford Works, had been in the habit of supplying Lord Francis with money. Master John, as his friends called him, was impelled to do this by a desire, common enough in Masston, to bask in the sunshine of aristocracy. This sunshine was freely offered by Lord Francis, who knew well how to turn his charm of manner into a commercially valuable possession. Mr. Buckle overshot his mark in that, in his eagerness to make his pursuits inseparable from Lord Elbston's, he took an obnoxious part in the disabling of "Traveller," the famous horse, who

stood to win the greatest stake of the Folkshire race. At this time such an undertaking had the merit of novelty; and the friends of Lord Francis, his uncle among them, when they were afflicted with moral proof of the dishonesty of one of themselves, made an effort to prevent any legal proof coming to light by helping the two men, who might possibly degrade their caste by being found out, away from the reach of conviction. The matter was so well managed, that no one out of the pale of Lord Francis's close acquaintance could venture to mouth any suspicion he had; while, on the other hand, this state of things might have been endangered, had Mr. Buckle remained in Masston. Whether from desire to repay his friends' kindness by helping a tradesman to step over their heads, or for some compunction towards his disciple, when he learned that Buckle had made over, on certain conditions, his father's old-established business to Robert Warner, Lord Francis, before he left the country,

appointed Warner as his agent over various lands associated with the Limethorpe estate. The lands then were apparently worthless, but if Mr. Warner, in his office as agent, could turn them to value, then a certain defined reward was to come to him. Lord Francis retained all legal claim over these acres, for to the courage of his race, he united an eye for eventualities; and while Mr. John Buckle, the follower, skulked out of Masston, Lord Francis Elbston marched out of it, as one not altogether without hope.

It was to such insistance as he could, that Lord Francis now returned. As he strolled back to his hotel through the bulging opulence of Masston, perfectly satisfied with his wisdom in the step he had taken, he passed Paul Blanchard, the man whose genius had quickened the wealth he had come to seek. But it was not given even to the trained eye of a disgraced aristocrat, to discern the spirit of all things.

CHAPTER VII.

" Certes this world a stage might well be called,
Whereon is played the part of every wight,
Some now aloft, anon with malice galled,
Are from high state brought into dismal plight.
Like counters are they, which stand now in sight
For thousand or ten thousand, and anon,
Removed stand perhaps for less than one."

—T. NEWTON, *Mirror for Magistrates.*

THE proposed meeting at the Oxford Works, which had given rise to so many hopes and fears, left nothing in tone or tint, up to a certain stage of it, to be desired even by Lord Limethorpe. The conjunction of decorum with piety produced a display of excellent manners and an exhibition of good taste. The good old lord was surprised into admissions for which he would have been unprepared the day before. Mr. Gadso was shaken in a few matters of ecclesiastical etiquette, and confided to Mr.

Warner, that rather than forego the happiness which such a meeting conferred, he would give up preaching in his gown: and was willing that the Act of Uniformity should perish rather than the cause of true religion should cease to be honoured by a commingling of its professors such as had taken place that morning.

But there is nothing perfect in this world, and enterprises of great pith and moment, as well as a man's finest pleasures, have been thwarted before now by the most frivolous excuses and the most trivial of events.

It was proposed that a formal account of the happy meeting should be drawn up and signed by all who had taken part in it, and the record be kept.

"Sign," said Lord Limethorpe to Mr. Gadso, but the reverend gentleman refused with much meekness, saying, "No; your lordship first."

"I am only a layman," replied his lordship, and this is a meeting of clergymen and mini-

sters, an official representation of the leading evangelical churches, which, we trust, may one day come into the unity of an active co-operation. I shall sign, of course, as chairman of the meeting, and therefore last."

This was decisive. Mr. Gadso thereupon signed, and added B.D. to his name, which was remarked upon in silence by our dissenting brethren. After writing his name, Mr. Gadso handed the pen to Mr. Sweetapple, who followed with M.A. Our Methodist brother thought these distinctions worldly and uncalled-for. The Independent looked upon them as offensive. So did the Baptist. But nothing was said. Mr. Sweetapple gracefully shirked the responsibility of handing the pen to any one, and laid it down. The Wesleyan at once pushed his way to the table, took up the pen, signed, and kept his place without making way for another, like one who, having gained an advantage, is unwilling to relinquish it on light or trivial grounds. The Independent

minister, a dark, awkward man, with the acquired manners of a blunt, outspoken, original thinker, advanced to the table, and stretched out his arm to take the inkpot from its buhl stand, intending to carry it to his own corner, and enjoy the pleasure of writing his name under circumstances of his own creation. In those days buhl inkstands were not so severe in design as now, but were very elaborate things, and it was not so easy as it looked to extract a massive glass inkbottle with the points of the fingers from what seemed to be a miniature *chevaux de frise*. But this the Independent minister proceeded to do. By a most unlucky and painful accident the heavy inkpot, but slightly held between the fingers, slipped from its holdings and fell, and with it fell its contents on to the spotless white trousers of Lord Limethorpe. There was a movement amounting almost to a commotion. But Mr. Gadso was equal to the occasion; he gave out the first line of the Doxology, which was sung

with surprising vigour, pronounced the benediction in his best manner, and the meeting was over. Each man left the room with the rapidity with which a medical man has been known to leave church during the morning service on receiving an urgent message, even though his way lay up the middle aisle. Lord Limethorpe, the only person not greatly disconcerted, walked quietly away, carrying his hat in his hand, till he reached the door, looking as calm and unconscious as if he were walking out of St. Paul's on a Sunday morning. He was followed by Mr. Warner, who said with much earnestness—

"Let me send for a cab for your lordship. I am quite distressed at this."

"I am much obliged, I should be glad of a cab."

And the lord and the master of the Oxford Works remained together in the outer room while the cab was sent for. No words passed between them. When the cab arrived his lord-

ship said, "Good morning, Warner," in a cheerful voice. Away went the cab, and Warner returned to his own room, and was speedily engaged in profound commercial thought. Not more than a few minutes appeared to have elapsed before Lord Limethorpe returned, and in a somewhat hurried manner entered Warner's room, and began looking under the table, and on the table, near to where he had sat during the meeting, and where Mr. Warner was sitting then.

Before Warner could speak, Lord Limethorpe said in an abrupt tone of voice—

"I left my pocket-book on that table, close to where you are now sitting."

Warner, who was much surprised to see Lord Limethorpe, was more astonished at his peremptory manner, and the words he used. Indeed he was dumb with astonishment. At last he said—

"It is quite impossible; your lordship must be mistaken."

"I am never mistaken, Mr. Warner, when I make a deliberate statement."

"What, or whom, does your lordship suspect?" said Warner, changing colour, as a monstrous and terrible thought flashed across his mind.

"I suspect nothing. I repeat what I say—I left my pocket-book on that table."

"I trust nothing of any value or importance was in it," replied the other with trepidation.

"Had there been nothing in it of value and importance," said his lordship, "I would not have troubled myself, being in this plight, to come back here;" looking Warner in the face in a very determined manner, and as if he were in the heat of a theological argument.

Warner was in the utmost consternation. The appearance of Lord Limethorpe, with the great splashes of black ink on his white clothes, his fists clenched, and daubed with writing-fluid, his hat jerked more than half-way off his

head, his face red, and his whole attitude menacing, produced very mixed emotions in Warner's mind, in which horror and surprise contended with alarm for the mastery.

"Do you think that I have got your pocket-book?" inquired Warner, rising to his feet and speaking in a tone of voice that greatly agitated him.

"I think nothing," was his lordship's reply; "I only know that I left it on that table."

It is not unlikely that this blunt question, asked in vulgar tones, and with a low and vulgar expression on the face, was suggested by Lord Limethorpe's appearance. How was it possible for a man like Mr. Warner, with a firm faith in the infallibility of clothes, to feel otherwise than something approaching contempt for one who but just now was a dignified lord of the realm, and who had, as if by some devilish magic, been changed into a chimney-sweeper?

Warner's face changed visibly. A new

thought seemed to seize him. He ran to the door which communicated with the yard, and in a loud voice called out—

"Nield, ring the fire-bell, close the front gates, and let no one leave the works."

Warner had trained his hands to troop down in orderly discipline whenever the fire-bell was rung, which was done at unexpected intervals for the sake of practice.

He returned to the room, where he discovered Lord Limethorpe inconsistently searching his own coat pockets. Warner began to do so likewise, each man looking the other in the face with staring eyes, and a turbulent movement of the shoulders; the fire-bell making a hideous clanging noise all the while, which made the windows tremble, and added fresh energy to the motions of the two anxious men.

At the sound of the bell a thousand men, women, boys, and girls, poured themselves out of numerous shops and rooms into the great quadrangle. All the hands came down in

rapid yet marshalled array, some carrying buckets, and all on the alert.

"There is no fire!" cried Warner, in a voice of thunder, as he appeared on the upper step of the flight which led into his room. "I am pleased as usual with your prompt and orderly movement. Stay," he added, in eager command, as he saw signs of departure among some of the crowd.

All eyes were now turned towards Warner, whose pale and anxious face caused no small amazement among the people.

"If there is no fire, then, what is there? there must be something up to make the gaffer look like that." "Blest if he doesn't look as if he had seen a ghost," were some of the remarks of the people made in confidence to their friends.

Warner advanced into the centre of the yard, and called around him the heads of the departments, some of whom were standing outside the crowd. These he addressed in bold and rapid words, telling them that, to his great sorrow

and indignation, it appeared that a robbery of a most daring nature had been committed that morning in the Oxford Works; that the person robbed was none other than the Lord Limethorpe, and his lordship it was who made that charge. "I have called you together in this sudden manner in order that we may convince Lord Limethorpe of the utter impossibility of such a crime being perpetrated on these premises—premises which, I am proud to say, ever since I have been master of them, have never been soiled by the committal of one immoral or criminal act.

"You will all be searched," he continued. "This, my friends, is only a form, but it is due to you, to me, to these works, and to Lord Limethorpe, that this form be gone through. I have searched myself, and each of you shall search the other, that all may share in the pleasure and the triumph of your innocence as well as my own being established."

This ostentation was natural to Warner.

No one knew better how to turn an occasion of seeming defeat to advantage. Of course if he had not implicitly believed in the utter impossibility of any one of his people being implicated in a charge of such enormity, he would not have gone through the expensive ceremony he was then conducting with so much satisfaction to himself. It would occupy at least a couple of hours, which, being equal to the loss of two thousand hours of work, made it a costly parade indeed.

Warner kept his place on the temporary stand, looking around with confidence, his handsome features being now flushed with a pleased excitement, and the deadly whiteness of his face having gone away. His practised eye soon detected a few irregularities, which, the novel employment the hands were then engaged in, naturally brought to pass. So, he called out in commanding tones, "The men must search the men—the women, the women. You boys, all fall in on one side."

Suddenly there was a great shout of merriment. It arose on the appearance of Lord Limethorpe on Warner's door-step, from which his lordship's inky garments came into the full view of the crowd. He descended, and made his way to where Warner, in a proud attitude, stood facing the hands.

"I assure you, Mr. Warner, that it was the farthest thing from my thoughts to accuse any one of taking my pocket-book. I accuse no one; much rather would I accuse myself. I have been trying with all my might to find the missing book, as I would have given the world to have found it in one of my own pockets. I say that I suspect no one—nor accuse any one of rob—take—having my pocket-book," said Lord Limethorpe, with much stammering and real feeling.

Warner, thoroughly believing in Lord Limethorpe's mistake, assumed a cruelty of manner, partly natural, partly designed—or the design was suggested by his cruelty.

"My lord, I believe you," said he, addressing not Lord Limethorpe, but the people before him. "Some mistake has, no doubt, been made. Your lordship has evidently got very excited. I was made angry myself, but I must now be allowed to take my own measures, and do what I think right."

There was now a coarseness in Warner's demeanour which delighted some of the hands, for they saw that their master knew how to speak up to a lord, without being afraid.

Warner was carried out of his artificial self, and the real Robert Warner, who had lain concealed beneath the veneer of refinement, religion, and respectability, with which, by his own will, and the aid of a commercial people, he had been able to coat himself, appeared in his true colours. Even to himself did this appearance come with as much surprise as it could have borne to those who had watched his career from its very beginning.

Shaking himself free as if from some momentary danger or weakness, he called out in a loud imperious voice—

"Where is Mr. Reklaw?"

"Here, sir," replied that worthy, who had, but just a moment before, arrived on the scene, and was standing behind his master.

"I do not see Mr. Blanchard."

"He is in his room, sir," answered Mr. Reklaw in a low voice.

"Send for him at once. It is my desire that all be present at this investigation. I wish to be surrounded by all my people."

Warner said this with a haughty toss of the head, and a fling in the air of his right arm, evidently intended for the much-enduring lord who stood wrapt in sadness close by.

The carnival of search went on. Men and women were standing in grotesque attitudes with their pockets turned inside out. More than one daring fellow, lost to all sense of decorum, if he ever possessed any, might be

seen stretching out the pockets of his trousers between thumb and finger, and putting on his face a saucy, imploring look in the direction of his employer. A wretched boy, ragged and dirty, who must have been a very recent comer, ran up to Lord Limethorpe with his shoes in his hands, his head thrown back between them, and his mouth very wide open, to give his lordship the opportunity of "searching his gullet."

And many other similar playful familiarities were taken by the crowd with their friends and companions that need not be repeated, which although not very witty to us yet provoked mirth in them, and in a general way proved their innocency of the charge laid against some person or persons unknown.

The speculations of the people on the probable contents of the missing pocket-book were numerous, and showed how strong in them was the imaginative faculty. They took it for granted that the contents could not amount to

less than several thousands of pounds in bank notes.

"Whadiyou know about bank notes?"

"Whyihaheardun say as how youcan hev fithousand pound in a single note."

This was disputed with much heat by the ladies, among whom the controversy diverged into a free exchange of sympathy of tastes, in such things as bank notes of great value could purchase. The conversation was fluent, but the ideas were few. One lady, distinguished for her expressive face and her parti-coloured eyes, whose print gown reached only a little below her knees, and who was appealed to as "Sal," on being asked what she would do with five thousand pounds if she had it, replied in great humility, "My eyes! if I know."

Others volunteered their ideas on the same subject with a ready cheerfulness as if it were matter of frequent meditation, while some again were utterly bewildered like little children cooped up in a gloomy room being suddenly

exposed to the strong beams of a mid-day sun. The chatter was closed in a burst of laughter by a feeble creature with pale hair, and meek gray eyes set in pink rims, saying, as if suddenly inspired with a great idea, that if she "only had five thousand pound she would have a baby."

On the whole the ignorance of these people was very pitiable; there was no lack of good feeling amongst them, and there might have been abundance of good humour, but their brains were clouded with care, as a field long since in Chancery is covered with thistles, where not even a butter-cup or daisy would condescend to take root and grow. But coarse as they were, they were not depraved. They had seen better days; the days when some kind of human duty, not too hard to do, had kept them willingly occupied—for the doing of it brought some growth and pleasant fruit—now they were chained to a dull round of toil which took their senses captive, and made them feel

that they were doomed to an everlasting task which grows duller, and still more dull every day which creeps upon them, and which shall continue to creep and crawl down to the last syllable of recorded time.

Lord Limethorpe, who had been conversing with Warner on quite different topics, here raised his hat to the master of the Oxford Works, and was taking his leave, when a sound, so sudden and so harsh, rent the air, that he turned to ascertain its meaning. It was an unearthly sound, and to him seemed as if hell itself had broken loose and was crying havoc on the world.

Three of the superior clerks had hurriedly entered the yard, one of whom carried in his right hand, which was raised on high, a purple leather pocket-book. On the instant the people divined that the missing book with its roll of wealth had been discovered—that it had been stolen, and the thief detected.

Warner stood like a statue. As the clerk

handed to him the pocket-book he clasped it in both hands, which he raised appealingly to heaven amid the execrations of the mob. He continued in that impressive attitude until the cries and hootings abated. Then turning to Lord Limethorpe he asked in an uncontrollable voice—

"Is this your pocket-book?"

"It is," replied Lord Limethorpe, looking inexpressibly sad.

Warner started as if he had been shot.

"Where did you find this?" Warner inquired in agitated words.

"We found it in Mr. Blanchard's coat pocket!"

"Blanchard! Blanchard! Mr. Blanchard," was quietly passed through the crowd until it reached the ear of a short pale-faced man in remarkably clean linen, who exclaimed—

"Mr. Blanchard! oh! that be damned!" and walked away.

There was now a hush. Every human being

could hear himself breathe. In the midst of the sudden silence, Warner was heard to say in a hoarse voice—

"Nield, take Paul Blanchard into custody."

Nield was the watchman of the Oxford Works, and, as every one knows, Mr. Warner was one of the magistrates of Masston.

CHAPTER VIII.

"A distracted conscience here is a shadow or introduction into hell hereafter." —SIR THOMAS BROWNE.

"*Faust.*—How comes it then that thou art out of hell?
Meph.—Why this is hell, nor am I out of it."
—*Marlowe's Faustus*, i. 5.

A STRONG man, torn with vexation, may be likened to a dog chained to a wall, whose frantic efforts to free himself from bondage cost him nearly his life. Mr. Warner was like an angry chained dog. No one dared to go near him, his sudden grief made him terrible to look upon. The Oxford Works were now stained with disgrace; and infamy of the deepest dye would for ever be associated with their name. All his religious sentiments were scandalised, his most cherished feelings outraged. He sat down in a corner of his room, and in agony began to imagine what his friends

and great acquaintances would say when the terrible news should reach them, and from time to time as the name of some fresh personage occurred to him, and a new light was cast on the designer's crime, he would ejaculate, "My God!" People would now believe anything that was put into their heads. Any lie started against him would be made to look like damning truth. How could he face his wife? Had Mr. Gadso kindly gone and told her of the meeting? It would please her to know that, but for the untoward accident of the inkpot, it had been a charming success. But now, after all her efforts, her anxiety, her hopes of this to which she had looked forward; she would learn it had been the occasion of crime and disgrace! What would she say?

There must be in some part of the unseen universe intelligent beings, who, not yet ripe for the refinements of the higher spheres, are set to watch the ways of men, and learn the effects of disobedience to heavenly rule;

the fate of the hypocrite, the discomfiture of impostors, and all such as practise the arts of deception on themselves as well as others. For the same weighty reason it is to be supposed, that these heavenly probationers indulge in laughter as they keep their watch. If that be so, and we have no evidence to the contrary, there must have been great mirth amongst them as they watched the miseries of Mr. Robert Warner as he sat that day in his room, the front of his head occupied with his own wickedness, his cerebellum with the wickedness of others and the possible consequence thereof to himself; and not one spindle, handle, wheel, or crank, in the whole of his intellectual or moral machinery, equal to the task of producing one single spark of hope. There have been men before now who have caught the sound of demon's laughter, and there and then changed their minds, altered their ways, and turned straight out of the evil road in which they were walking into the paths

of right. But Mr. Warner's ears were too dull for such catching of heavenly sounds. Say what he would, it was not Paul Blanchard's stealing Lord Limethorpe's pocket-book and being found out, which occupied his tortured brain; it was the conviction that he was going to be found out himself, which brought the great beads of sweat on to his capacious brow: it was not what Edith would think of Paul Blanchard, but what she, and all her great friends, would think of him, her husband, when she and they should come to know of his thefts, and his other crimes whose names were at present only known to himself. These thoughts spread a horrible blackness over Warner's intelligence, and among other things deepened his foolish conviction that Paul Blanchard, in view of his approaching marriage, had adopted this means of enriching himself: "The blackhearted fool; I would have given him twice the amount with a free hand rather than this should have happened." Warner

spoke these words with the desperation of a man for whom heaven had no councils nor earth one helping hand.

"The carriage is waiting, sir."

Warner mechanically rose and walked out of the room. Once in the fresh air, new thoughts, but of the same hue, continued to fret him. "How could this wretched thief now marry Sarah Armstrong?" That was for ever out of the question, and many other things also, for ever and for ever out of the question. How many fresh fears had been started? Just the number of the hopes that had been slain.

The carriage rolled on, but Mr. Warner's painful thoughts kept pace with its swift wheels. He would get out and walk. This small effort was a slight help to him in trying to restore order to his confused spirits, now in as great a tumult as was the mob in the quadrangle of the Oxford Works in the early part of the day. On alighting from the carriage a thought struck him, and he told the coachman

to "drive back to the works and tell Mr. Reklaw that he must come and see me to-night at the hall."

The coachman, who knew there was something amiss, and glad of the opportunity to carry some news to his co-mates of the stable and the servants' hall, who were but little blessed with means of gossip, drove back as he was ordered without the slightest token of displeasure.

As Warner walked leisurely on, passing by one or two grand houses, and catching glimpses of others in the distance equally imposing, his courage rose, and his mind began to clear as his sympathies with riches and power became quickened. No more pious or profane ejaculations rose to his lips. Elbston Hall came into view with its hundred front windows all ablaze with gold. When the old lord should die—and he could not in the course of nature be expected to live long—he, the master of the Oxford Works, might have the honour of

making the mistress of Baston Lady of Elbston. That one inspiring idea brushed a hundred cobwebs from the inside of the house in which Warner lived. Yonder in a grove of trees rose the square tower of Elbston Church, steadfast, upright, unyielding, receiving the rays of the sun as if it were appointed to preserve them against a rainy day. Here the relieved pedestrian passed by a field enclosed in an ornamental fence, where there were painted cows feeding, in refined deliberation, undisturbed by a single care or an anxious thought. And right before, coming towards him along the road were two ladies; one tall, firm, high-bred, in strict keeping with the church tower—the other more in keeping with the golden air which danced among the leaves and played round the patient creatures who were rejoicing in the sweet grass. The one was his wife, the other her sister.

"You must let me surprise him," observed Julia with much gaiety to Edith.

As the two ladies drew near, Warner threw off the early troubles of the day, and he became occupied with other cares more easy to deal with than those which had cast such awful shadows on his soul. Besides, with Julia to help him, the conversation would not only be free, it might be gay. But Warner could no more remove the trace of painful conflict from his face, than a river can cleanse its bed of slime. Edith could not refrain from noticing her husband's face. But she said nothing. She had become accustomed to disappointment. It had but too frequently happened, that the florid promises of the morning, became changed into drizzling doubts and clouded fears by night-time. She watched the face of her husband in silence, and, when a wife takes to such reading, and reads without comment, it is very likely that some jarring chord exists, which self-respect alone keeps from being touched.

"Who do you think has been to see us?"

inquired Julia in her usual sprightliness of Mr. Warner as they drew near.

Warner, who was in no hurry to answer, but saw by Julia's face that the visitor could not be any one connected with the day's trouble, said, turning to his wife—

"Let me hope it was some one you were glad to see. I myself have very sad news to tell you. The meeting was every way successful. Did Mr. Gadso come to see you?"

Edith simply shook her head. She saw that what she had longed and prayed for contained some distressing alloy.

"A terrible, I may say a very awful, thing has happened at the works. I am utterly overcome and unmanned by it; I am distracted. Oh!" he continued in his best, earnest manner, "if you could now tell me that it was nothing but a dream, I would fall down here on my knees and thank and bless you. Lord Limethorpe's pocket-book, containing much of value,

was stolen from my own room during the prayer-meeting by the—a—the designer."

Warner could not, or would not, trust himself to mention the designer's name, and although both ladies knew well enough to whom allusion was made, neither said anything. It was too painful and inexplicable. To Julia it was as impossible that Paul Blanchard could be guilty of an atrocious crime as that she could steal her birds' wings, and use them to fly up into the sky. To Edith, who, as we know, had more defined knowledge than her sister, the unregenerate heart was liable at any moment to be overtaken, and led into a temptation, which it had no power to resist. She had always regarded Paul as being in a dangerous state, and though she was hurt to the quick, she was not surprised.

"How was the discovery made?" inquired Julia, the old Ascham spirit rising within her.

"His lordship's book was found in the designer's pocket," was the reply.

This was conclusive.

Julia, seeing Mr. Warner to be unaffectedly troubled, and Edith with her eyes closed, her lips painfully compressed, and her face ashy pale, thinking to relieve the gloom of things by a little brightness of her own, repeated her former question to Warner, "Who do you think has been here?"

"Pray tell me, if it interests you," was the reply.

Julia, who had prepared a little pleasant surprise, now feeling that nothing she could say would mend matters, remarked carelessly, "It was only my very old friend Lord Francis, whom you have heard me speak of so much."

"Lord Francis!" exclaimed Warner, in a voice which not only opened Edith's eyes, but gave Julia the impression that the speaker had been shot. "How dare he? It is impossible! He could not have asked to see me?"

"Why, he left us to go to you," said both

ladies, who regarded Warner's agitation with amazement.

"He spoke so highly of you," continued Julia, "that we thought you must be delighted to see him, and I was delighted with the hope that you would certainly return with him to dinner. He spoke of you with warm admiration, which caused me great pleasure."

Warner was now as much puzzled as perplexed. Had his acquaintance with the polite world been greater, his perplexity would have increased. Dissimulation was natural to the master of the Oxford Works, it was a recognised and necessary element in business; but the polite dissembling by which the commerce of cultivated people with each other is carried on, he held to be sinful, the very cankerworm of society; certainly the evidence of its rottenness and corruption. Had Warner known that it was only by Lord Francis speaking such graceful lies of himself to the ladies, that his lordship could obtain the knowledge he required, and

that in telling Mrs. Warner and Julia that he was on his way to Warner when he left them, the adroit and ignoble lord was simply angling for the help of two charming allies, Warner's suspicions might have taken some definite shape, and his alarm had certainly been deepened. He was now thrown back on himself, the uppermost dread in his fearful soul being that if the treacherous trick on the Bristol merchants, years and years ago, were now to be brought to light, they might accuse him, even him, the chief man in Masston, of stealing Lord Limethorpe's pocket-book, and when detection became inevitable, causing it to be conveyed into Paul Blanchard's pocket, nor would there be wanting many people who would believe it, black and horrid lie though it were. This introspection and self-communing made him incapable of perceiving the approach of a danger far greater than any he had imagined.

They walked leisurely on to the Hall, for

some time in silence, which was broken by an audible sigh from Edith. Her troubles were none the less light because they were indefinite. Had she discovered the difference between the cares we make for ourselves, and those which are made for us by others? It is but too likely. She was not a lady of great mental powers, nor were her associates any more than herself careful to distinguish strong opinions from intellectual strength. Like many more exalted women, Edith Warner had learned to walk by faith. It was a sweet luxury. She could barely toddle when she ventured into the paths of reason, and this brought her much bitterness. She sighed and hardly knew why. Perhaps some spectre, waiting for a darker hour in which to reveal itself, had crossed her mind to intimate its existence, and prepare her for something that would one day surely come, take up its abode in her soul, and remain with her for ever, as a torment from which there should be no promise of escape. Perhaps not,

although spectres are much more common than we think for, and there are spectres of the day as well as of the night.

Truth to tell, Edith's married life had brought her no married joy, and the very object for which she had married was further off now than it was when she was Edith Ascham. Edith Ascham likewise appeared to be dead. She had been courageous and beautiful—a smiling, free-hearted woman, loved by dumb animals, feared by common men. And now she was careful and troubled, not about servants, or money, and such paltry cares as belong to the pantry, but about the great globe itself, its Maker and His plans; and these cares and troubles all owed their existence within her simply because, instead of marrying for true love, she had married the power and influence of Mr. Robert Warner. Warner, too, had his cares, but they were of a kind with which he could do battle, and find some increase of strength or boldness spring from

the conflict. Edith's cares, on the contrary, robbed her of strength, as the sweet but pernicious food, which first decoys and then kills the victim for whom it is prepared, or the child who unwittingly partakes of it.

"Edith, were you not much pleased with Lord Francis?" inquired Julia, as they walked under the trees but without noticing them.

"I was a little entertained by the story of his travels," replied her sister, in the tone of voice of one shivering with cold. "He is greatly changed, certainly."

"For the better?" inquired Warner, glad to have something to say.

"He was always a gentleman, and full of kindness, and is so still," said Edith, speaking confidently from a very limited knowledge, and on a matter on which any one with a wide experience would have pronounced a very different verdict.

Julia, who was walking in front of them, here turned suddenly round, and playfully curtsied to her sister for the character she had be-

stowed on her friend. Both sisters had only known the reprobate when he was on his best behaviour, or in his gayest moods. They knew nothing of his life, his ways and manners among his fellows, or the nature of his connection with the world. Warner knew nothing but the worst of Lord Francis, and the mention of his name again brought the shadows of night on his face.

"How I wish he would come back and live near us again," said the careless Julia.

No response was made to the wish, and all walked on to the Hall as if they formed part of a funeral procession entering a church.

That night, after dinner, Mr. Warner was the first to rise from table. "I shall not be in for prayers," he said to his wife as he rose and left the dining-room for a smaller room close by.

There was something so uncommon in this, that his wife and her sister were compelled to notice and speak of it. It was the first time

in their married life that Mr. Warner had allowed the cares of business to interfere with the spiritual duties he exercised in his family.

The small room in which Warner had shut himself was furnished with books. A pleasanter place to sit in no heart could desire; the furniture made it so, as well as the mellow light with which it was filled. Warner was proud of good company. He had wrought miracles by it, for he made grapes to grow on thistles, or what in Masston was almost the same, he made men believe that his thistles were vines. Who could doubt that the husband of Edith Ascham, the friend of Lord Limethorpe, the master of the great Oxford Works, a pillar of the Church, and a magistrate, was a gentleman and a Christian? Who could believe him to be a scoundrel and a liar? It was simply incredible. And in this charming room, where he now sat, surrounded by the world's greatest, best, and wisest of men, all

dressed in morocco and gold, this pink of impostors, made himself believe that he was one of them. Why not? He was familiar with the works of prophets and apostles, was included in the glorious inheritance won and left by martyrs, and was a friend of the Most High. Thrones, principalities, and powers, were mere steps on which he should mount to immortality; and we are not to wonder, therefore, that a superior being of this description should be able to make grow figs and grapes on thistles and thorns. What good was there in being intimate with the head of the department, if you could not use him for your own private ends?

Mr. James Reklaw, who had received the message of his master through the coachman, duly presented himself at the Hall, and was received by Warner in the morocco chamber.

"Sit down, Mr. Reklaw; will you take some wine?"

"I should prefer brandy," was the disagreeable answer.

Warner rang the bell and ordered some brandy to be brought. "I have sent for you," he said when his ferret's needs were supplied, "to learn the latest news you can give me of what they say in the town about this awful crime."

"They don't say much, sir," said Reklaw unblushingly.

"Not much!" cried Warner in a tone between relief and surprise.

"Not what I call much. Everybody knew that Blanchard was going to be married, and everybody thinks that he wanted to feather his nest."

Warner rose and took two or three turns moodily about the purple room, pondering over this coincidence with his own thought. Reklaw followed his master's motions with cunning eyes.

"Mr. Blanchard's rise at the works was very sudden, sir," said Reklaw, watching the

effect of his words. "I have heard say that his visits up here at the Hall gave him high notions, and turned his head."

"They say that, do they?" observed Warner, sharply stopping in his walk. "What do they say of me?"

"They say that a better master never lived, and it will go hard with Mr. Paul Blanchard," answered Reklaw, feeling great comfort and relief and a pleasant sense of freedom.

"I want particularly to ask you now, James," said Warner, "did you see Blanchard at the prayer-meeting? I asked him to come, but he positively refused."

"Why, sir, he stood right behind you and Lord Limethorpe."

"Are you sure?"

"I saw him with my own eyes."

"Did you speak with him?"

"No, sir; we are not on speaking terms."

"How is that?"

"He insulted me once before a lot of the

hands, and I have had hard work to keep order amongst them. Ever since that going to the play, there has been a spirit of insubordination creeping up, and I'm determined to leave the works. I can't stand it any longer."

Helping himself to more brandy, he rose from his seat, and added, apparently in pain, "I would like to leave now."

"That I shall not allow," said Warner haughtily.

"You can't force me to stay," replied Reklaw with growing insolence; "not for twice the money you gave your favourite Blanchard, who has done more mischief in the works than can be undone in twenty years. Besides, I shall not only leave you, I want to leave this country. Australia's the place to make money in."

"What would you do in Australia, Mr. Reklaw?" asked Warner with a quietude that cowed the other's coarse insolence.

"Well, sir," he answered, looking side-ways

on the floor, "I might get some goods consigned to me for sale out there."

"Do you mean from the works?"

"Or from Messrs Birtles, Bright, and Brush," said Reklaw, still keeping his uncertain eyes on the carpet.

"I might have known this was coming," said Warner to himself. But he betrayed neither suspicion nor displeasure as he said to Reklaw—

"I believe you can serve me there better than anywhere else." Then taking out of his pocket an ostentatious gold watch—a habit with him so great, that he frequently obeyed it unconsciously, he inquired, "When would you like to sail?"

Reklaw, completely abashed by Warner's courage and promptness, answered, "Well, sir, I believe I might serve you out there, and I'd rather serve you than any one else."

"Then set about your preparations," said Warner with the decision of a chess-player who sees the end of the game from the move

he is about to make, "for a speedy departure; you will get whatever money you require. And now we will say Good-night."

"Good-night, sir," responded Reklaw, offering his hand to Warner as if he had just returned from the Colonies after a long residence there. Warner rang for his servant, to whom he said, after opening the door for Mr. Reklaw, "Take away the brandy and open the windows." Then so pleased did he feel with himself that, finding there was yet time, he went into prayers.

Reklaw, no less pleased at getting more than he expected, and with so much ease, was lauding the astounding greatness of his master, and trudging down the lane towards Masston, when he found his progress marred with sudden roughness.

"Ax your pardin', Mr. Reklaw," said a voice which he recognised; "I must have a sovereign."

"Why should I give you a sovereign?" replied Reklaw.

"For the same reason which obliges me to ax for not one but five: five's about the number as will do for me just now."

"Which way are you going?" inquired Reklaw with assumed carelessness, but not by any means liking the insolence of the young rough.

"I'm not a goin' anywhere just yet, leastwise till I get them five couters."

"You will get five knuckles, if you don't clear out."

On this the Masstonite said in a whining voice, "Leastwise, you will give me two and a arf."

"I will give you one now," said Reklaw, "and you can come to my house to-morrow. I've something particular to say, and may do you a good turn you little expect."

"I'd rather 'av another sovereign now," said the rough complainingly.

"You'll get it to-morrow, I say," answered Mr. Reklaw, who hurried away, followed at a

distance by one for whom he knew he must perforce provide.

Mr. Reklaw went to bed in a somewhat perturbed frame of mind. He would liked to have poisoned the Masston rough, but not being equal to murder, resolved on an act of kidnapping.

On the other hand, the last thing Warner was heard to utter that evening, was the question, whether he should ask Lord Francis to dinner the next day.

Julia, to whom the query was addressed in a smooth voice and a manner quite changed, resenting the evident unhappiness of her sister, gave no encouraging answer to a question that was designed to give her pleasure.

CHAPTER IX.

"I beseech you let his lack of years be no impediment to let him lack a reverend estimation; for I never knew so young a body with so old a head. I leave him to your gracious acceptance, whose trial shall better publish his commendation."—*Merchant of Venice*, iv. 1.

Reklaw had wilfully misstated the facts when he told Mr. Warner that not much was said in Masston regarding the theft of Lord Limethorpe's pocket-book. Much was said, and more was done. The disbelief in Paul Blanchard's guilt was general, and was delivered from many mouths in the highways and by-ways of the town. Dr. Cumberladge and Jeavons had given bail for him at once, and this fact would have added, if any addition were needed, to the popular trust in his innocence.

"I suppose," said, soon after Blanchard's

arrest, a little old man, whose white linen was his wife's pride, "that this will be a matter for the 'sizes,—that means lawyers with wigs on and gowns, and money in their pockets, which, say I, we shall pay."

"It means nothing but that," said many others around him.

Tappit, the striker of anvils, struck out the same idea in the Pudding Bag.

"This means sending round the hat," said, in another place, the little wizened man, who had once been addressed by Paul as Zacchæus. And at Jeavons' shop a crowd collected, made up of people desirous of contributing whatever they could to the expenses of procuring the best lawyer that might be had for love or money, or both, to defend Paul.

This caused uncommon happiness to Jeavons, who had been the means of so training these applicants in saving their money, that they had money to give away.

While Jeavons was counting up by himself

the amount of promised subscriptions, there came into his shop a man whom he had often seen looking in at his window, but had never spoken with.

"Good morning, sir," said the visitor, whose manner betokened unbounded confidence in the provision dealer. "I should be glad to know on what principles you carry on this business of yours. I am told that you make a profit for the people who buy your goods. Is that so?"

"That is so."

"Do not think me rude if I ask you, how much have you paid in profits to your customers in a year?"

"I expect to pay," replied Jeavons, "at the end of the year, more than thirty shillings to five hundred people."

"May I take a seat?" said the visitor with open eyes. "This interests me much, and many friends of mine."

"By all means," said Jeavons, "but my

time is very short. I am in great trouble on account of a friend of mine."

"Anything to do with law?" asked the other briskly.

"With nothing else," replied Jeavons.

"Does it arise out of the shop?"

"No; but it is connected with the founder of the shop, who will be tried at the coming assizes for a crime which he never committed."

"How do you know that?"

"Just as well as I know I didn't do it myself," replied Jeavons becoming excited; "and look here at this list of the working people who have subscribed for his defence. It was he who started in them my ideas."

"Very interesting," said the other, whose attention was now diverted from the shop to the subject of Jeavons' excitement. Jeavons, encouraged by the other's interest, gave him, as briefly as he could, Paul's story. When it was finished, his visitor, after a short silence, said, "Got a counsel?"

"Not yet."

"I can find you one."

"Do you know him well?"

"Known him from a boy; and a better man or a better lawyer I don't know. He's young—so much the better for you—he'll go heart and soul into the work. There's his address, make your attorney write to him at once. And now," he went on, "you would probably like to know something about me."

"You evidently know," replied Jeavons, "something about me and my shop. I did not know that my scheme had aroused attention in any one outside of Masston. I am not surprised, but I should be glad to learn that others were taking it up."

"The young barrister I was talking of," said the other, "has bothered me about something of the same kind, till I lost patience. Now I see how it works, I have more confidence in him than ever."

"Does he think of the working people?" inquired Jeavons.

"I can't get him to think of anything else," replied the other.

"Then," said Jeavons, "he should be the man to defend Paul Blanchard."

"Glad you think so. My name is Birtles. When I picked up this youngster I was well off. He had run away from this town of Masston."

"How long ago might that be?" asked Jeavons.

"A matter of fifteen years or more."

"Why, I ran away from Masston myself!" said Jeavons.

"Where did you go to?"

"I didn't leave the town."

Birtles, passing unnoticed for a moment the strangeness of this answer, said, "I have never known why that boy ran away. When I picked him up he was in great distress; but he had evidently been well cared for. To cut

a long story short, his appearance struck me, and I said to him—I was driving my trap and saw him toiling footsore along the road—'Where are you going?'"

"'I am going to get my own living,' said he, and somehow the little chap looked as if he meant it. I could have laughed, but he was so proud and so serious that I could only say 'Jump up and let me take you as far as you're going.' Well, I found the little beggar was going nowhere, and I resolved pretty soon to help him somewhere. You know, Mrs. Birtles has never had any children, and I was quite sure she'd take as kindly to this little fellow as I did. Wonderful woman, Mrs. Birtles! She'd often chivied me for taking too much to people that I did'nt know, but as for this boy, she took to him even more than I did."

"Then you adopted him?" said Jeavons.

"I'm quite sure," said Birtles with a hesitancy foreign to his character, "that you will

come to know him, he will make you know him; and you can then ask him for the rest of his story. All I need tell you is that he's a very clever fellow, and his name is Hugh Arden."

"Hugh Arden?" said Jeavons musingly, "that's not a Masston name."

"No," replied Birtles, "I suppose not."

"Do you know anything more about him?"

"All I know would take too long to tell just now. My wife insisted at first on my taking the boy back to his home, but when I made this known to him one morning at breakfast-time, he got up from the table just as if he had been an old one, went quietly out of the room, and left the house without anybody knowing it. When I found he was gone, I went after him, and I caught my young gentleman just making his way to one of the ships alongside the quay." Here Birtles gave a good-humoured chuckle. "I believe," said he, "that boy only consented to come back be-

cause he saw I'd come after him without a hat. Fancy one of the three B.s—Bright, Birtles, and Brush, you know—going hatless through Bristol! The end of it was we jumped into a hackney and went back to breakfast. After that, for fear of losing him, we never asked him any more questions."

"This was very kind of you," said Jeavons.

"I have had my reward," replied the other.

"You say he is a barrister?" went on Jeavons.

"Yes," said Birtles, "he is, and doing well, though he's young at it. The worst of it is, now I come to think of it, that you can't get my man to defend your friend without great expense."

"In what way?" asked Jeavons.

Birtles, without appearing to hear the question, said, in his sudden way, "I'll see you to-night; will you be here to-night?"

"If you like. I shall be very glad to see you here again," said Jeavons with a slight tone of disappointment.

"Very well, my friend, come and dine with me at the Green Dragon. I have an idea which I will explain. I am delighted. We shall do something. I have never asked a favour of any man yet, but the favour I am going to ask will not be refused. Good-bye now—come at six—do me the favour—I shall have something to tell you." Birtles then left Jeavons standing in his shop and straightway directed his steps to the Oxford Works.

Birtles was a man who could only hold one idea at a time, but that one he held fast. Pursuing the notion which now possessed him, he entered the great works and asked, with a determined air, for Mr. Warner.

"What name, sir?" said the clerk in attendance.

"Tell him I must see him," answered Birtles.

"Mr. Warner will not see you, sir, unless you give him your name," said the clerk.

"He will—he will be glad to see me. Tell him I say so."

The clerk disappeared, moved by Birtles' earnestness to an errand he had never before undertaken. Mr. Warner also must have been impressed by the clerk's message, for he condescended to appear in the doorway of his room.

"Morning, sir; morning, Mr. Warner," cried Birtles in a glad assuring voice, raising his hat and advancing towards the master of the Oxford Works.

So cheerful and straightforward was Birtles that Warner had no time for presentiment or self-accusations, and the two merchants found themselves together in Warner's room on a footing of undoubted friendliness.

"I have come to ask a favour, Mr. Warner," Birtles began. "Glad to see that things are flourishing with you, sir; the three B.s are not flourishing, but that's their own fault."

Warner, who had been listening with some interest, bowed interrogatively and exchanged a troubled look for a smile of sympathy.

"Yes, their own fault," went on Birtles. "That Australian speculation was disastrous, we were tripped up, sir; we were too sharp; we thought we knew everything, and there was somebody knew better than we did, and forestalled the market. Ah! you were too wise, Mr. Warner, to put all your eggs in one basket. But I didn't come to talk about that."

Warner could do no less than offer, in his most plausible manner, to give every help he could in any way to one to whom he owed much.

"That's handsome," said Birtles.

To this proposition Warner bowed a gratified assent which, with all his cunning, he could not persuade himself to feel.

"I must beg your pardon," said Birtles, "for running away, when I called to see you some time ago. But the fact is, that you looked so good and kind I was really afraid you'd make some tempting business offer that I couldn't resist. So, sir, I ran away from you. The

truth is, since that Australian business, we've had hard work to make our way up again."

"It would have been an honour to me," said Warner, finding a somewhat faltering voice, which to Birtles seemed charged with good feeling, "to have given you any accommodation."

"Ah! that's just what I told my wife. I knew you'd be ready to do that. I told her so. But she made me promise not to run into any risk we couldn't discharge at once; and, thank God! that woman has brought the three B.s straight again."

Warner, with a shade of anxiety still in his voice, said—

"Your visit, if I understand you aright, is not on business?"

"Not at all. No, I came to ask a favour for a man I've never seen; and it's not quite that either. There's a man you've employed named Blanchard."

Warner could not help starting. The sudden

conjunction of these two men, Birtles and Blanchard, both of whom he had unscrupulously used as his instruments, produced on him an equally sudden shock.

"My chief designer was named Blanchard," said Warner, quickly recovering himself.

"Do you think him guilty?"

"I would give much to prove him innocent."

"I can do it—with your help," rejoined Birtles.

"How can I help you? what have you heard?" cried Warner eagerly.

"That's just it," said Birtles. "I've heard that none of the workpeople believe him guilty, no more do you. Now then, I know a young lawyer, adopted son of my own in fact, mad about working-men, he's the man to defend Blanchard. But he's on another circuit; you know what that means. Now you've offered me accommodation, give it me in this way. Save these working men's shillings that they're

subscribing, and help me to retain this young man for Blanchard's defence."

"Would it serve you?" asked Warner cheerfully.

"It would help me. I know something of workmen, and know what your workmen will think of you when they learn, as they shall, who pays the shot." And perhaps for the first time since his last appearance in that room Birtles indulged in a hearty wink.

"This seems almost providential," said Warner, with great deliberation. "I had thought how I could help my poor friend Blanchard—and saw no way. Under the circumstances, my name could not appear in a subscription list for his defence, and he is too proud to accept any private assistance directly from me. You have saved me from a great embarrassment. Your intervention," said he, with a sudden shake of Birtles' hand, "anticipates all my difficulties. I will write you a cheque at once."

"No, no," exclaimed Birtles, as he took the

cheque, "this is too much." And in his sudden manner, which Warner well remembered, he tore up the cheque and said, dropping into a chair, "We can't want more, first and last, than three hundred pounds."

Warner wrote a new cheque, and thus it happened that the expense of Paul Blanchard's defence by Hugh Arden was provided by the master of the Oxford Works.

CHAPTER X.

"What light the study of the inferior animals is capable of throwing upon the higher qualities of man!"—DARWIN.

WARNER came home after his interview with Birtles in a mood which was almost jubilant. As he got out of his carriage he met Edith, who was going out to cut flowers in the garden.

"You are early," she said.

"As I intended to be. Is any one coming to dinner?"

"I did invite Lord Francis, but he has left Masston."

"Yes," said Warner abstractedly. "Did you ask any one else?"

"I asked Mr. Sweetapple and his mother."

"Then I am the more glad that I returned early."

Warner, bent on pleasing his wife in a

matter which gave him little trouble, said, taking her flower-basket and giving her his arm, an attention which was almost strange to her, "Let us find the best flowers we can. You have never used your Venetian glasses," he said, as they walked down a path loaded with foliage to the rose-beds.

"Mr. Sweetapple," replied Edith, "whom you know has a fine taste, admired them much when he saw them the other day."

"When they are filled with yellow and red roses," said Warner, "he will like them yet more."

And leaving Edith on an elaborate bench, he disported himself in a vigorous slaughter of the roses. Edith, as she watched him, saw an exuberance of power in his attitude, that fitted the belief in him in which she had lately been somewhat shaken.

"I think," said Warner, bringing the roses to her, "that now all you want upon the table is a pair of Julia's birds."

"Do not snap the scissors in that barbarous way," said Edith. "But listen to me. Let Mr. Sweetapple sit next to Julia, and leave them alone as much as you can. I will amuse Mrs. Sweetapple."

"Then I shall go to sleep," said Warner in a tone of protest. And though Edith did not heed it, he meant what he said.

"Don't you like Mrs. Sweetapple?" asked Edith with wide eyes.

"I should like her better if she were not so Frenchified," said Warner.

"I think it's just for that I do like her," replied Edith, in a tone that invited a pleasant response.

"Does she remind you of Lord Francis?" asked Warner with some tartness.

"Quite different. Lord Francis is a man of pleasure and fashion. Mrs. Sweetapple is very natural, and I think quite good. She is so fond of her son; and, you see, has an evident regard for his holy mission."

"No doubt she is a very delightful woman," said Warner. "What do you mean to do about her son and Julia?"

"I have thought much of that," said Edith, "and I think we should act for Julia's good. I shall not press her, but shall try to guide her."

"I remember what you said some time ago," answered Warner solemnly. "You will do well."

Upon this they returned to the house. Warner thought he had never seen Julia look so beautiful as she was when she came down to the drawing-room.

"Mr. Sweetapple is to be here to-night," said Warner, "with his mother. She is a nice old lady."

"Very!" said Julia. "I like her very much. I would like her for a mother."

"Then you like her son?"

"No; that is exactly what I do not like."

"This is very unreasonable."

"No; I like Mrs. Sweetapple just as I like Dodo my parrot; she *is* so amusing."

"Do you like people as they resemble your birds?"

"Yes; do you know I think I do."

"Am I one of your birds?" asked Warner, with a confiding air.

"Oh! you gave me the cage."

Warner at another time might have taken offence at this light speech; but the face of the whole world had changed to him in a day, and he felt such confidence in his lucky star, that he was ready to think everything designed for his pleasure.

"Can't you let me be a bird?" he asked. "Where will you place me?"

"What would you like to be?"

While Warner, unused to light talk, was searching for an answer, the Sweetapples were announced, and Warner became occupied in speculating which of Julia's birds most resembled the youthful parson. As he shook hands

with Mrs. Sweetapple, who came into the room with an air of freshness scarcely less than Julia's, he would have given much to point out to Julia the resemblance between Mrs. Sweetapple and the Javanese sparrow.

"Do you know, dear," said Mrs. Sweetapple to Julia, "I cannot figure it in my head how your birds have taken possession of me?"

"Take care, mother," said Mr. Sweetapple, indulging himself in a joke which he thought a little daring; "possession is a serious thing."

"I cannot help it. My dear Miss Ascham's parrot may be a *diable*. I hope he is not, for I hear him talking constantly."

Edith at this moment came into the room, and, making apology for her lateness, said, "Has Julia's parrot become the little bird that tells secrets?"

"No," said Julia decidedly; "the only secrets he knows are those I tell him."

"Now those are the dear little secrets I would best like to know," said Mrs. Sweetapple.

"I wonder if he was revealing a secret to me the other day," said her son.

"He had better have kept it to himself," replied his mother. "But one cannot doubt that he has bitten you too, Miss Ascham; and I am convinced he would bite me if he could; he is a malicious fellow, depend upon it. Why do I think so much about him? I suppose it is because he is so like a man, and all men bite if you let them. If you can keep them in order, then they are very good."

"Some men are given to biting," said Warner, with a smile that showed his teeth.

"The men who do not bite," said Mrs. Sweetapple, "are those whose mouths are constantly stopped with bonbons. If I had now to manage a man—I do not count my son, he is very gentle—the first thing I would say to him would be"——

"Dinner is ready, if you please, sir," said the butler, appearing just in time to fill up the

little woman's sentence. The party went in to dinner with every appearance of good-humour, Edith, who by Lord Francis' absence was left to go in alone, seeming to follow Sweetapple and Julia like a guardian angel. Julia was the first to notice her sister's arrangement of the flowers.

"Yes," said Mrs. Sweetapple. "Now I should like to ask Mrs. Warner if she did not think more of herself than the flowers, when she was arranging them. I remember at Baden-Baden a little flower-girl, who was so bright and joyous over her bouquets, one could not help thinking she had made the flowers."

"Do you know, Mrs Sweetapple," said Edith, "I did feel very proud for these flowers? and I shall certainly ask Mr. Gadso if there is not some danger in giving way to tastes and feelings of this kind."

"I can tell you better than Gadso that there is great danger if you don't take care," said Mrs. Sweetapple. "I know some of those

insolent fellows at the Louvre—who stand there like watch-dogs—have got, by seeing always the pictures, to think that they are artists, while they are really so many dusters to keep the dirt away."

Julia, with much mirth, answered that she was no better herself, "For I have never met Mrs. Sweetapple," she said, "without feeling myself a great deal better than I know I am."

"This is a pack of nonsense, my dear," cried Mrs. Sweetapple; "there is no danger in that—let us bring the dear flowers to our tables, wear them in our hair, or stick them in our buttonholes, for their own sakes, and not for ours, and we shall never go wrong."

"Do you not think, Miss Ascham," said Sweetapple, bending in a lily-like way towards Julia, "that there is something significant of character in the love of flowers?"

"No," said she; "I can't understand any one being without it."

"I think," said Edith, "I have the key to all

this. If the old Earth could speak, would it not say, 'This is my Master's livery'—we too can wear it in His service—that is what Mr. Sweetapple means, I think."

"Ah, bah! you got that from Gadso. I believe *le bon Dieu* gave us these pretty things just to please us, and nothing else."

"My mother," said Mr. Sweetapple to Julia, "only thinks of what she says two days after she has said it, and this delightful talk will be a pleasure to her for more than a week to come. It will last me a much longer time."

"I have forgotten it already," said Julia.

"And yet," said Warner in his gentlest voice, "I still hear you talking of your great actor."

"That is a thing to last for ever," she answered.

Mr. Sweetapple looked perturbed, as he had prepared other little speeches on the same subject which Julia's remark destroyed.

Here Edith rose, took a flower from one of

the pretty glasses, gave it to her husband as she was leaving the room, and said, "Wear this for me."

Mr. Sweetapple looked as if he would have liked to have received a similar commission, but Julia walked out of the room with Mrs. Sweetapple on her arm, leaving not even a look behind her. She was made perfectly happy for the rest of the evening by seeing what she conceived to be a little love passage between Edith and her husband.

Warner, in talking to Mr. Sweetapple, found himself compelled into a worse bargain than he was accustomed to make. Upon the capital of words and wine which he expended, he got but a poor return. Mr. Sweetapple was depressed, and Warner's thoughts took a flight to another region than that of the young curate's love. He was listening to the favour begged by Birtles, he was watching the flight of Lord Francis from Masston, he was sorrowing for Paul Blanchard, and, finally, felt proud

that he could do justice, whilst he loved mercy.

"Shall we go into the other room now?" he said to Mr. Sweetapple, who was only too willing to act on the suggestion.

As they were passing from one room to another, there came a loud and sudden knocking at the Hall door, so loud that it startled the whole house, and so sudden that Warner halted to hear what it might mean.

Mr. Sweetapple had now joined the ladies, the Hall door opened, and Warner caught a voice he knew too well. In answer to the inquiry if Mr. Warner was at home, Warner went forward and presented himself.

"How do you do? pray come in," said the master of the Oxford Works to his heaviest creditor.

This was the distinguished Friend, who had given his co-operation to Edith in securing the union of the religious sects, and his capital to Warner to invest in commerce.

Lord Francis Elbston, before returning to Paris, had gone direct to the distinguished Quaker, who lived in one of the magnificent palaces erected on the Elbston estate, to obtain such information as he was able, regarding the value of the land, and the amount of rent and such other items of knowledge as might prove of value. He knew that what the Quaker would tell him would be true, he could approach a Quaker more easily than any other person equally strange to him; and Lord Francis further judged that Warner having but little private intercourse with Quakers, his visit would remain unnoticed. This was the only mistake Lord Francis made. The Quaker promptly determined upon seeing Friend Warner after his interview with the aristocratic profligate. It was necessary to have a clear understanding on a matter which was too much surrounded by clouds. He had the greatest confidence in Warner; but certain questions put by Lord Francis seemed so

strange to him, that he felt it was only his duty to satisfy the suspicions which he could not smother.

"There is nothing in all this," said Warner, after hearing the Friend. "Would you like to take your money out of the Elbston estate?"

"Not if thou givest me thy word that it is safe."

"I will give you either my word or the money," replied Warner, "whichever you prefer."

"Then there is nothing to fear from this relative of the man called Lord Limethorpe?" asked the Friend.

"There is no fear," said Warner, placing his hand on his breast, and calmly waiting for whatever surprise might yet be in store for him.

"I am satisfied," said the Quaker, "but I will see thee to-morrow. Good-night, friend."

"Will you not come in?"

"I have already told thee no." The Quaker

went on his way, leaving with Warner a crowd of anxieties, fears, and suspicions such as had never assailed him before. He became now fully and unmistakably aware that Lord Francis had, as he suspected, returned to Masston to claim a sum of money which was owed to him and could not possibly be paid by the debtor. Warner had, in fact, so used this money that none of it could be called in: and his generous offer to the Friend was made in the confident hope that it would not be accepted. The Master of the Oxford Works had trusted overmuch to two probabilities—the one that Lord Francis would not dare to return to Masston, the other that in his idle Paris life no report of Warner's actual proceedings could reach him, and that as long as his profligateship received enough money to procure his daily pleasures he would be content to remain his agent's pensioner. But Warner's fame was not now confined to Masston or the English seaports. Lord Francis had heard

from a travelling acquaintance such dazzling, and indeed such exaggerated, accounts of the great merchant's wealth, that he at once suspected he was being cheated, as indeed he was. Warner had not only kept in his own possession the results of a successful speculation upon which he entered as agent; he had, moreover, used them for further speculations of his own. Indeed the greater part of the profits on the Elbston estate was sunk in the Oxford Works.

And now Lord Francis had come to claim his own. What he had seen for himself, and what he had learnt from the Quaker, proved to him that he could at any moment descend upon Masston, and take to himself the great wealth which Warner had drawn from it. With the dread of this moment possessing him, Warner went back into the drawing-room to find his innocent frends engaged in dethroning empires more vast than his, by burying their cities in couplets from the poets.

They were all laughing at their own difficul-

ties in discovering a well-known town in the lines given by Julia.

"What are you all laughing at?" asked Warner in great need himself of mirth.

And Mrs. Sweetapple, in most tragic tones, recited—

> "'My May of life,
> Is fallen into the sere and yellow leaf.'

Can you find a town in that?"

Warner could make nothing out of the question, but the lines struck him with a singular force. Mrs. Sweetapple, perceiving his perplexity, exclaimed, "I see you do not know the game."

"I fear I cannot learn it now," said Warner; "is it not time for prayers?"

CHAPTER XI.

"*Duke.* Give me your hand. Came you from old Bellario?
Por. I did, my lord.
Duke. You are welcome: take your place.
Are you acquainted with the difference
That holds this present question in the court?
Por. I am informed throughly of the cause."
—*Merchant of Venice*, iv. 1.

At nine o'clock on one of those August mornings, which appeared to cling with a loving embrace to Baston Hall and its fair gardens, the blast of a trumpet was heard in the market-place of Masston outside the Court-house. The windows of the little old houses hard by were shaken by it, and many hearts were made to tremble.

It might be idle to inquire why the blast of brass has always been thought symbolical of justice; but there is no doubt that to some natures

justice is the same thing as terror, and of such natures there were many in Masston. On this August morning, the only people utterly superior to the fear of the law were the little children who gambolled round the terrible trumpeter, and laughed with bewildered delight at the appearance of the young men, with grey hair and black petticoats, who stood in groups about the door of the Court. One little wretch, hardened in crime, pointing out the yellow trousers of one of the seniors of the bar, distilled wonderment among the rest of his tribe, and for the moment put an end to their frolics. In the centre of the market-place was a large crowd of dwarfed men with anxious faces, dressed in their Sunday clothes, who waited eagerly to observe the aspect of the Judge who was to try their friend. Presently, amid all the pomp which in those days belonged to a judge, the Sheriff's carriage rolled up, and from it descended a tall old man robed in scarlet, whose face was as inscrutable as the

pale sky which hung above them all. He passed in, and a pushing crowd followed him.

The bench was filled with well-known Masston faces. Mr. and Mrs. Warner, Mr. and Mrs. Gadso, Dr. Cumberladge, and many others were there. Julia had stayed at home, saying that she did not want to hear proved what she already knew, that Paul was innocent. Sarah also for this, and other reasons, had stayed away; but the knowledge of her belief in him was better to the accused man than her presence could have been. Benjamin Jeavons stood near the dock, and Birtles found a place among the counsel. Lord Limethorpe, looking very old, sat on the right of the bench. The grand jury had been sworn by the judge's marshal, had found two or three true bills, among them one against Paul Blanchard, and the moment for his appearance had come. He was brought into the dock, where he stood fresh and upright as if he stood by a river's side, rather than at a bar of justice.

Edith found herself regarding him with marked attention. Dr. Cumberladge smiled at him meaningly. Warner's eyes were fixed, with an attention that had never wavered since he first came in, on the prisoner's counsel, who at that moment leant across the table for a pen, and by the action attracted also the eyes of Dr. Cumberladge, who started like a man waking from a dream. The prisoner, in a gentle voice, delivered his plea of Not Guilty; the usual forms were gone through, and the trial began. Serjeant Lawlud, with whom were Messrs. Papcook and Pawkins, proceeded to inform his lordship and the gentlemen of the jury that this was a very simple case, as no doubt it was. What Serjeant Lawlud also said, but should not, because it had no connection with the issue to be tried, related to the growth of an evil spirit among the labouring classes, which manifested itself in acts of insubordination and other acts, which clearly indicated a determination to brave all the laws of society

in asserting their supposed rights, or righting their supposed wrongs. The prisoner at the bar, continued the learned Serjeant, bore, it appears, an excellent character up to the day when, as it will be shown, he committed the crime for which he was now to be tried. He occupied an important position in the great works where he was employed, and received a very large and handsome salary. It, however, will be shown to you, gentlemen of the jury, that the prisoner was connected with a new trading concern, which had grown so rapidly that, in order still to increase its growth, or to provide for pressing needs which overtook him and his friends in connection with it, he was tempted into the crime which was so speedily brought home to him. It will also be shown you that the prisoner was on the eve of marrying into a family far above him in station, and over and above these motives for helping himself to other people's property, he was trusted by his master most implicitly, and had at the

same time every opportunity of going into all the rooms of the works at all hours whenever it suited him; he had, in short, unbounded liberty to do as he pleased; and his master placed in him that unbounded confidence without which the prisoner could not have hoped to carry out his evil design.

These were some of the things which the learned Serjeant should not have said. But the case was so simple, the audience of such a superior order, and the Serjeant himself in such capital spirits, that it was only natural for him to give as much importance to the trial as he could. Serjeant Lawlud reserved his description of the prayer-meeting at the Oxford Works, when the prisoner committed his atrocious offence, for the close of his address. It was sad, said the orator, to think that it was at the solemn moment when all were bowed in the holy service of prayer that the prisoner had committed the unhappy deed for which he was now to be tried, and if the jury, bringing their

undoubted intelligence to bear upon the facts presented to them, could possibly find any other explanation than that that crime was committed by the prisoner he should be no less relieved than surprised.

"Mr. Robert Warner."

It was as good as a play to be in Court that morning, as indeed it almost always is, though more especially, when on a day like this, counsel were encouraged by the presence in Court of many handsome men and fair women. At the close of the learned Serjeant's impressive words, the learned Judge, with the same inscrutable face as when he descended from his carriage, was occupied in writing a note. The galleries of the Court, filled with the working people of Masston, all friends of Paul, were in what they themselves called an infernal stew. The severe aspect of the Judge and the eloquence of the Serjeant took them captive. Not an eye turned to meet the look which Blanchard cast at them; they could only

look at the awful Judge who was writing a playful note to his daughter, while they thought he was taking down the accusing words of the terrible Serjeant.

The prisoner's counsel, who appeared to be occupied in admiring a metallic pen, which, till then he had never seen, and was, in reality, debating with himself the style and manner of Serjeant Lawlud, was an object of intense and increasing interest to some of the occupiers of the bench. Warner was occupied with himself. Birtles was occupied with scrutinizing now the face of Paul and now the steady calmness of him who was to defend him. Birtles was anxious but did not fidget. Lord Limethorpe was the only person in the whole Court who seemed to have nothing to do, a demeanour which some of the younger men in horse-hair could well have imitated, but dared not; it was better to read a newspaper than do nothing.

Mr. Warner gave his evidence in good form, and his expressions of sorrow for the prisoner

appeared to be genuine. The Serjeant concluded a long examination, which in part corroborated his opening speech; and then sat down. The witness remained for a moment in the box, appearing to invite cross-examination; he was about to leave it, and had already turned his back on the counsel, when Mr. Hugh Arden (with whom was Mr. Blackston Goodlad) rose, and raised his finger as if to ask a trifling question.

"Mr. Warner!" he said, on which Warner turned suddenly round as if he had heard his own voice, "did you see the prisoner in your room on the morning when this prayer-meeting was held?"

"I did not."

"If he had been there you must have seen him?"

"I think so."

"Now, did you at all see Lord Limethorpe's pocket-book during the meeting?"

"I did not."

"You were, I believe, much astonished when Lord Limethorpe returned to your room in search of his missing property."

"I was greatly astonished."

"You said, I think, that the meeting broke up in a little haste, owing to some slight accident?"

"I have said so—for so it was."

"And there was, perhaps, a little hurry or confusion?"

"No doubt that was the case."

"Can you tell us, Mr. Warner, if your clerk, Reklaw, was present at the prayer-meeting?"

"He certainly was."

"Very well," said Mr. Hugh Arden in a tone of voice which seemed to imply that it was very ill for some one.

He resumed his seat with a thoughtful air; the witness once more prepared to go away, when—

"One moment," called out the youthful barrister, as he again rose. "I might as well

ask you—you were not present when the pocket-book was found ? "

" I was not."

" Very well."

The manner of the cross-examination won the attention of some members of the bar ; even the Judge was observed very slightly to incline his head on one side to his " brother Lawlud " as the prisoner's counsel sat down.

The last question, the voice, raised to its best quality in the words " one moment," sent a thrill of wonder and amazement through Edith Warner. It was the voice of her beloved, the sound of mastery, the pitch of command, the tone of love. To her, the filthy, dust-defiled Court became as if by magic changed into a temple, beneath whose roof her youth, with its high hope and purpose, its happiness and joy, was restored to her. She looked at the young face of the speaker, surrounded as it was with the mere trappings and mask of age, and fancied that heaven had once

given her such a face to worship and to love. She watched every movement of his hands with as keen a delight as her ear received the sounds of his voice which grew in volume, depth, and sweetness.

Then Lord Limethorpe gave his testimony, and Edith's pleasure was increased by the simple gesture with which the youthful counsel signified that he would not cross-examine his lordship.

The case was complete. Two of Mr. Warner's clerks testified to finding Lord Limethorpe's pocket-book in the pocket of the prisoner's coat, exactly as Serjeant Lawlud had stated, and the learned Serjeant declared, on the close of this testimony, that that was his case in a solemn tone which shewed how much it pained him to have been so successful in proving it.

"May it please your lordship and gentlemen of the jury," began Mr. Hugh Arden, and again Edith Warner felt the deep, tender, but firm voice of the speaker search every

thought of her heart and pierce it. She trembled, she grew faint, and rose to leave the Court. Dr. Cumberladge, but barely able to control his own feelings, saw the lady's embarrassment, and gave her his hand to help her. But for this firm and timely support she must have fallen back into her seat. She reached the judge's room with profound thanks to Dr. Cumberladge, who assured her that change of air was all she needed.

The Doctor returned into Court, where he found Mr. Warner with his eyes fastened on the speaker who was then absorbing every one's attention.

Warner appeared to be quite unconscious of what had happened to his wife.

Tearing away from the statement of the learned counsel for the prosecution every thread of extraneous matter, Mr. Arden declared that there was not a tittle of evidence against the prisoner, and complained in modest, but firm tones, of the absence of one witness

whom the prosecution ought to have called but had not. "Gentlemen, Mr. Warner has sworn that he did not see the prisoner in the room from which Lord Limethorpe's pocket-book is alleged to have been stolen; and all that the learned Serjeant has produced by way of proof that the prisoner was there, is the word of one of Mr. Warner's clerks to Mr. Warner. That, gentlemen, is not evidence, as his lordship will inform you. The name of that clerk is James Reklaw. Why has not James Reklaw been produced?"

At this moment, while the young barrister paused with an impressive look at the jury, a note was thrown to him across the table, by one of his brother advocates. He opened it, and read it hastily. It contained these words: "Ruckles is here." He again addressed the Court. "I find," he said, "that I need not trouble you with any set speech. I will proceed at once to call—Robert Ruckles." At these words, as if he had sprung up through

the floor of the Court, a light-haired youth, with small grey eyes, and heavy shoulders, appeared in the witness-box.

"Your name is Robert Ruckles, and you are employed at the Oxford Works?" inquired Mr. Arden.

"I was turned off," answered the youth sulkily; "my mother is still there."

"Oh! your mother is still there. When were you turned off?"

"The day after the row between the master and Mr. Blanchard."

"At the time of that 'row,' however, you were employed at the Oxford Works?"

"O' course I were. I was a sort o' servant to Mr. Blanchard."

"A sort of servant? What does that mean?"

"Well, I used to fetch and carry things for him."

"Did you fetch or carry anything on that morning?"

"No; Mr. Blanchard kept me all the morning a learning of me to draw."

"Then you were in his room all the morning?"

"I never left it."

"Did Mr. Blanchard leave the room?"

"I remember as how he said he was agoing to speak to my mother about me. And in course he went out then."

"About what time was this?"

"Just upon dinner-time, that's twelve o'clock."

"Then between ten and twelve o'clock you are sure Mr. Blanchard never left his room?"

"Yes, I'm quite sure."

"What makes you so sure?"

"Cause he was atorking to me about my mother and my sister, and about my learning to drawer, and being what he called a better man; he was atorking to me all the time and making lines for me to do after him."

"Anything else?"

"Yes, there were sommut else."

"What was it?"

"He a'most made me cry."

"You recollect that?"

"Yes, I reckerlect well enough."

"When did the 'row,' as you call it, begin?"

"Just about then."

"Was there any one besides yourself in Mr. Blanchard's room when he was away?"

"Mr. Reklaw came in to look for Mr. Blanchard."

"Did he speak to you?"

"No, he didn't see me."

"Oh, he did not see you. Did he do anything?"

"Yes, he just did something."

"What was it?"

"He went to Mr. Blanchard's coat and he put a book in the pocket!"

The manner in which the witness delivered these simple words produced what the newspapers called a profound sensation in Court. Serjeant Lawlud was seen to be in eager con-

sultation with the prosecuting attorney. The prosecuting attorney pushed his way through a thicket of elbows to where Mr. Warner was sitting on the bench, and held an eager consultation with him. Mr. Arden, with singular tact and patience, appeared to be consulting his brief—he was in reality allowing the witness's words to have their full weight with the Court.

"Go on," said the Judge in an approving tone of voice.

"Now is that (motioning to the officer of the Court to show it) anything like the book you saw Reklaw put into Mr. Blanchard's pocket?"

"Why," said the witness with a stare, "it's the very same identical book."

"How do you know that, my man?" asked Arden daringly.

"Why, I never afore saw one like it."

"What did Reklaw do when he had placed that book in Mr. Blanchard's coat pocket?"

"I saw him look round, and walk out on tiptoe."

"Very well. Did anything else happen?"

"Yes; Mr. Arklus and Mr. Simpson came in, and they opened the drawers, and they put their hands in my pockets, and then they put their hands in Mr. Blanchard's coat pocket, and they found that book."

"Well now, tell the Court why you did not tell Arklus and Simpson that you had seen Reklaw put the book into Mr. Blanchard's coat pocket."

"Well, gentlemen, I know as how Reklaw had a spite agin Mr. Blanchard, and I wanted to lay hold of him, and to make Mr. Blanchard like me for sticking to him when I'd tell him what happened."

"What followed?"

"I goes up to Reklaw, who was astanding behind the gaffer, and says, says I, whispering in his ear, 'You put that book into Mr. Blanchard's coat pocket, because as how I sor ye.'"

"What did Reklaw do then?"

"He slipped a couter into my hand, and said he'd give me five more to keep my mouth shut."

"A what?" inquired the Judge, severely.

"A couter, my lord; which is slang for a sovereign," replied Mr. Arden.

On which the Judge looked long and solemnly at the witness; and the witness looked very much like a dog expecting to be pelted with stones, and unable to escape.

On this Mr. Arden sat down, and left the scamp Ruckles to the tender mercies of Mr. Serjeant Lawlud.

"This is a pretty cock-and-bull story you have told us," began the Serjeant, who was almost as much puzzled how to deal with the witness as the witness was ashamed of his own confession. "A very pretty cock-and-bull story," continued the learned Serjeant, looking now at the jury and now at the Judge.

"Did Mr. Reklaw give you the promised five pounds?"

"Yes, he did."

"Did you ever ask him for more?"

"I asked him for more, and he gave me what I asked."

"How much did they give you for coming here?

"Nuffink."

"How much do you expect to get?"

"Nuffink.

In brief, be it said, the learned Serjeant was unable to shake, by his cross-examination, the evidence which the scamp Ruckles had given. How far the hasty and earnest consultation of the attorney for the prosecution with the master of the Oxford Works prevented master Ruckles from being professionally turned inside out may be left to the imagination of the reader, who is already aware of the mission upon which Mr. Reklaw had departed to Australia. Ruckles could, if asked, have told the Court

how, when he was ferreted out by the attorney for the defence, he had been on the point of sailing for Australia in company with Mr. Reklaw, who was going there as the accredited agent of Mr. Robert Warner; but he was not asked. Warner now became aware for the first time of Reklaw's real object in leaving the country, and perceived at once that on his own connection with his departure might be put a very dark construction. After Ruckles' dismissal from the box, Mr. Arden proceeded to call Dr. Cumberladge, Benjamin Jeavons, and others, as witnesses to character for Paul, and the Serjeant declined any attempt at shaking their testimony. The most remarkable thing about Dr. Cumberladge's appearance in the box was that Mr. Arden, who had looked full at all the other witnesses, examined the doctor from behind his brief. The Doctor explained, in the course of his evidence, that Serjeant Lawlud's statement as to Paul's approaching marriage into a family of higher standing than

his own was incorrect; the woman to whom he was betrothed occupied the position of companion rather than servant in the Doctor's family, and belonged to Paul's own class. Jeavons testified that Paul had no connection for profit or loss with the provision shop.

Then occurred the most tragic incident of the trial, which was, however, known to only two people in the Court. Dr. Cumberladge walked straight out of the witness-box to where Warner sat, and gave him a folded slip of paper on which was written, "The counsel for the prisoner is your own son."

Warner, who had been in a state of tension all through the trial, felt, as he always did when any undefined terror assumed a definite shape, inspired with new determination. He looked round for his wife, and did not see her. Turning to Mr. Gadso he said, with perfect calmness, "What has become of Edith?"

"I have been so engrossed," replied that excellent man, "by the proceedings that I only

missed Mrs. Warner two minutes ago. I am informed that she was overcome by the heat, and drove home." For this piece of news Warner was not unthankful. He resumed his attention to the case. Mr. Serjeant Lawlud was making his speech, in which he dwelt on the worthless character of the testimony given by Ruckles, and informed the jury that if they could in their consciences believe the evidence of a ruffian who could be bought body and soul for a few pounds, no one would be more delighted than himself to see the prisoner acquitted of the grave charge against him. But he was there to discharge a duty, and it was imperative upon him to warn them against letting any personal feeling, or any mistaken desire for mercy, interfere with the discharge of theirs.

Scarcely had Brother Lawlud sat down, when the Judge, with great peremptoriness and unusual clearness of voice, said—"Gentlemen of the jury. This is a case with the discussion

of which I need trouble you very little. You have heard what the learned Serjeant has said as to the evidence of the lad Ruckles, which if you believe it, will at once exonerate the prisoner at the bar. I will ask you to consider whether it is likely that Ruckles, for purposes of his own, or from any desire to serve the prisoner, should have invented or learnt a circumstantial story involving a confession of his own wickedness in taking a price for his silence as to this crime. That is for you. You have heard the character given to the prisoner by men of his own class, and of a class above him, and to that you will give its due weight, while you will remember that the evidence against the prisoner is of a purely circumstantial kind. Gentlemen, you will consider your verdict."

The Judge bowed to the jury, and the jury turned round, put their heads together, and in less than a minute showed their faces to the Court again. Mr. Jackson, the clerk, glad to

have an opportunity of stretching his lungs, asked them, as if they were a mile off instead of a yard, whether they had agreed upon a verdict, and what it was? and the foreman answered, "That they found the prisoner Not Guilty." "Then," said Mr. Jackson, dropping a sheet of paper on to his desk, "he is not guilty."

"God bless your lordship for that!" cried a little woman from the gallery, while she brought one hand down on the other as if she were an auctioneer striking a bargain.

"Paul Blanchard," said the Judge, "you have been tried by a jury of your fellow-men, who have found you not guilty of the charge brought against you. In their verdict I entirely concur, and I will add to it that you leave this Court with an unblemished reputation."

Mr. Arden rose from his seat, and applied to the Judge for a bench-warrant for the apprehension of James Reklaw. "The applica-

tion is unusual, but under the circumstances I will grant it," said the Judge, who had been so much pleased with Arden's bearing throughout the case that he instructed his marshal to invite him to luncheon.

When Warner returned to Baston he was met by Edith and Julia, who in the same breath asked him two different questions. He answered Julia's by repeating the verdict. "I told you so," said Julia joyfully. He was passing into the house when Edith stopped him. "You did not hear my question," she said. "Do you know the barrister who defended Mr. Blanchard?"

"No," answered Warner in a harsh voice, and shaking his wife off his arm, went into the house.

CHAPTER XII.

" How many cowards, whose hearts are all as false
As stairs of sand, . . .
Who, inward search'd, have livers white as milk."
—*Merchant of Venice*, iii. 2.

" Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,
Which we ascribe to Heaven."
—*All's Well that Ends Well*, i. 1.

It was a cause of amazement to Warner to find that he was becoming cold, and at times even brutal, to his wife. He mourned over it in secret—he hated himself on each occasion his temper gave way—for he lost not only his self-respect but his power. True, he did not love, but the question forced itself upon him, why was he so rude to one who was so gentle—so cruel to her who had only done him the wrong of marrying him. He could not tell. But in truth he took no pains to find out, or, what is

equally likely, he dreaded even his own sober answer to his own question. A liar—a thief—a scoundrel, double-dyed—a wretch whose only rest from torment lay in self-deception — and whose character and fortunes were built on the deception he practised on others, could no more help being conscious of his own baseness in the presence of a woman like her who was his wife than the unconscious needle can help pointing to the north except when a stronger magnet governs it, when, without doubt, it will be sure to point in the very opposite direction.

It was quite natural that Edith should ask her husband if he knew the young barrister, whose look and manners had moved her so mysteriously; and the young barrister being none other than his own son—stolen by means of treason, and the theft concealed by all the arts of crime—it was equally natural that her husband should give for answer a deliberate lie, accompanied by some sign of resentment for being compelled into giving it.

Edith, who knew that these fits of harshness passed away if she kept silence, and attributing her husband's disturbed mind and ungentle manner to the events of the day, continued to dwell on the figure of Hugh Arden. As she sat in her room looking on the green lustre of the fields, and the sweet and dappled beds of lovely flowers, she heard the tones of his voice, and she felt his face imprinted on her heart.

"He might have been our son," she said, and then some large warm tears fell from her eyes.

Julia here entered the room, and perceiving her sister's tearful face, went, as was her custom on such occasions, and knelt down at her side, put her arms round her waist, and pleaded a question with her eyes.

"I am not crying, Julie."

"So I see," said her guardian, "you are only shedding a few tears to give you an appetite."

The sisters kissed each other, and Edith went to dress for dinner. She found her

husband in her room, her emotion, still strong but a little subdued, urged her to take him in her arms.

Warner, unable to resist such goodness, responded with as much warmth as he could, and the two passed a single moment of gentle peace.

"Robert," she began in a delightful voice, "how would you like Mr. Hugh Arden for a brother-in-law?"

Warner laughed boisterously. Edith thought unreasonably so.

"I am very fond of Mr. Sweetapple, you know, dear; but I am quite sure Julia does not care for him, and never will. Of all the men I have ever seen, I think Mr. Hugh Arden the handsomest,—and how good he is!"

As Edith continued her somewhat excited talk about the young counsel, arranging her hair at the glass, she caught a glance of her husband's face which was reflected in it. Warner was in the act of delivering a silent

sigh, raising his eyes to heaven, and placing his right hand on his breast.

The two faces came together in Edith's mind, the one reflected in the glass, the other which she carried in her heart.

In an instant the room was filled with startling noises. Edith's emotion obtained the mastery; she broke into a laugh which was not laughter, so much as many sounds being shattered and broken to pieces and she fell to the ground, uttering some confused words.

This was very unlike Edith. Warner had always regarded her as a woman of great strength of mind. He had certainly seldom consulted her feelings. He was intensely surprised, and greatly agitated for a brief space. He hung over his wife for an instant, irresolute, not knowing what to do. But in that instant Edith opened her eyes, which met those of Warner, and with a smile of unearthly sweetness, she said in a calm and loving voice—

"He might have been your own son."

Women have been called the saviours of men, and, no doubt, there are some women who are so anxious to be raised to the office and dignity of saviours, that if they can get no one to nail them to a cross, they will try and hang themselves on one, believing with sublime infatuation, that their sorrows and sufferings must prove effectual in raising the men they love into the lovely form and fashion of their own beautiful ideals.

"He might have been your own son." Edith in saying those words was ready to yield her body and soul as the price for the discovery in her husband of the qualities she had once attributed to him. She really meant to say, "This man is what I took you to be." But that would have been to exchange the sufferings of love for the responsibilities of reason.

Warner, if he could only have known it, m ght have there and then declared that Hugh Arden was none other than his son. For in that supreme moment of unselfishness, and

unreasoning love, Edith would have found not only nothing of offence, she would have rejoiced in finding that the sweetest dream of her life might yet become a living reality. She would have connected her emotions on first seeing Hugh Arden with her love for Hugh Arden's father; the sweet, though pain-producing, thrill which ran through her frame, on hearing the sound of the young advocate's voice, would have been to her equal to Heaven's own seal to whatever she might do.

As for Warner, he was blinded by his own confusion. Instead of seeking refuge in honest confession, he preferred a refuge of lies. His great danger, he thought, lay in its becoming known to his wife, that this handsome limb of the law was the offspring of his own sinfulness. Whilst he allowed himself to dwell on the fact that he had actually been induced by Birtles, a man whom he had deeply wronged, to retain his own son for the defence of Paul Blanchard, whose wrongs were still greater, he could not

see that it was nothing but pure accident; on the contrary, he firmly believed that it was a deep-laid plot on the part of some one who was jealous of his position in the world, and the power he wielded in it. It was this arrogance which kept him cold to his wife, at what must be called the critical period of their married life; it was this that made him insensible to dangers far greater than any which had yet overtaken him. His son had come to life again, the young bird which had been tossed out of the nest into the abyss below, and believed to have been killed, had come back a great and mighty eagle—had come back, not grimed with disgrace, or coated with infamy, but clothed in all the beauty of manhood, and armed with the most powerful of weapons, the sword of justice, or, what was more impressive to Warner's mind, the sceptre of the law.

While Warner was thus reeling to and fro in a storm of his own raising, a meeting had taken place between Hugh Arden and Dr. Cumber-

ladge. Soon after the trial, the Doctor had sought out the young advocate, and met him face to face. And now the Doctor's sins, committed in all innocence and good intention, were to find him out, as surely as Warner's crimes had overtaken their author. The Doctor, forgetting that he had deprived Hugh of his mother, and unwittingly cast him forth upon the world, remembered only on seeing him again his own delight, and the wealth wrung from the boy's father, with which, heaped up through many years, he could now endow him.

"My boy!" cried the Doctor, as he encountered Hugh and Birtles.

"This is my father," said Hugh, with a bow to Birtles, "whom I am most glad to introduce to Dr. Cumberladge."

This was a cruel stab to the Doctor, and one which perhaps only a lawyer could have given, but he said simply, "I tried all I could to find out where you had gone; and to see you now

prosperous and happy is a great relief, but I cannot help wishing you had stayed with me."

"I wanted to find out where he came from, Doctor," said Birtles.

"Yes," said Hugh, as if interrupting a witness, "and it was my doing that he did not find out. How is Dolly?"

"Do you recollect Dolly?" asked the Doctor with a smile.

"I heard him talk of Dolly many a time," broke in Birtles, "but I never heard till now what her surname was. Master Hugh's rather close like, as a lawyer ought to be."

"Don't be hard on us," said Hugh laughingly, "we are no closer, I am sure, than the commercial men of Masston are, as you may guess from the story of our friend Mr. Reklaw. And that reminds me I have a business engagement with an attorney who has come to see me, I will be back soon." He left the room.

"Mr. Birtles," said the Doctor, going up to

the merchant with profound emotion, "we two are the fathers of this noble boy. I brought him up; I may say that he owes his life to me, but he would seem to owe more to you: for you must have saved him from perishing. He loves you. Do not fear that I will try to disturb that love."

Birtles, surprised into supernatural stillness, said, "This is very awful, very awful indeed. I picked him up in my gig, when he was running away from Masston. Did you pick him up?"

The Doctor paused; and found a way of keeping his promise to Warner.

"This is, as you say, very awful," he rejoined solemnly, "I too found that boy on a doorstep, in Masston, and, as I have said, brought him up. Did he tell you anything of his life with me?"

"He never told me your name. But he said the reason why he ran away was, that he found his mother was not his mother, and the boy he took for his brother struck him in the face."

At this point Arden came back.

"You are my boy after all," said Birtles; "nobody knows who you are except me: and I only know that Dr. Cumberladge saved you from dying, and that you ran away from him who might have been your father instead of me."

On this Hugh, trained to hide his feelings, looked down on the floor, much as he had looked at his pen in Court.

"I hope I shall do credit to two such good fathers," he said.

"Ah, Doctor!" said Birtles in delight, "Mrs. B. was right when, years ago, she wanted me to bring this boy back. He's too clever for a son of mine: if I'd had any they'd have taken after me; and I'm sure I should never dare to talk to a jury as he did."

"He must love his profession?" said the Doctor with some anxiety in his tone.

"I love it so much," said Arden, "that I shall ring this bell."

A waiter answered it.

"Bring in a bottle of your oldest port."

The waiter disappeared.

"I am going to entertain my two fathers," said Arden. "With such parentage," he continued, with the bravery of one who "would not be Sir Nob in any case," "none can deny that I am a man!"

Birtles clapped Hugh noisily on the back, and clinked glasses with him. The Doctor drank his port abstractedly. He was thinking that, scoundrel as he knew Warner to be, he could not go back from his word to him; and that every circumstance continued to make his deed, which he now felt to be impious, of separation between mother and son irrevocable. If he told Sarah her son lived and prospered, what would it profit her? For the love that Paul Blanchard bore her, she would get the love of a son who had never known her. If he told Hugh that his mother lived, and who she was, the news could not but check his growing suc-

cess ; and, worse than that, it would inevitably lead to his seeking and discovering his father. The Doctor sighed.

"Come, come!" said Birtles, hearing him, "there should be no sadness here;" and filled the Doctor's glass again.

"Who is this Mr. Warner?" asked Hugh, who had been thinking of the trial.

"He is the master of the Oxford Works," said Birtles emphatically.

"That we know," said Arden in a forensic tone. "But where did he come from? What is he?" he asked, turning to the Doctor.

"He rose," said the Doctor, in a slow, constrained voice, "by his own merits."

"Like me?" said Hugh laughingly.

The Doctor made no answer, and the conversation dropped for a space.

"Is the old school going on?" asked Hugh presently, as the wine seemed to prove its cheerful effect.

"I believe it is," answered the Doctor; "but we left Masston, soon after you left us, for a farm of mine out of town. You will come and see us there?" he said with a curious hesitation.

"Assuredly," said Hugh; "my father Birtles shall drive me over, if you will give us the direction. Will you stay and dine with us to-night?"

"I must go home," said the Doctor. "I will tell them to expect you."

He drove home. He determined to settle in his mind the course he should take, under the chequered circumstances by which he found himself mastered. He was glad and he was sorry, now bewildered for a moment and now firm and steadfast. But he could come to no decision. The only certain thing in the world to him at that moment was, that the ponies were rattling along at a very absurd pace. Whether these intelligent creatures were making haste out of Masston to get clear of its foulness, or

glad to carry glad tidings to the Hermitage, or had any other reason, is best known to themselves. It is a fact that they went at a splendid speed, and their hoofs made a musical clatter on the road, like the beating of drums in battle. The Doctor noticed them at last, and said to the off mare, "Why, Polly, what's up?" on which Polly straightened her neck, and shook her heavy mane over her eyes, as if to hide her thoughts; while the near horse arched his long tail, pushed himself against his collar, and horse and mare had a very jolly time, with all the road to themselves, home straight before them, and the master driving them himself. The consequence was that the Doctor found himself in front of his own door before he knew it, and long before he had resolved on the course he should take.

They were all on the look-out for him; for they were a thoroughly happy family, who preserved their sympathies fresh and tender, by keeping them, not as a stagnant pool close to their own door, but as the current stream which

flows through many lands, and sweetens the sea where it finds its rest.

"How the ponies are coming along!" said Sarah.

"Yes," said Dolly, "they know on which side their bread is buttered."

"And sugared," said Shirley. "I never knew a pony yet take to sugar who did not get to believe that he was conferring an honour on the lady from whose hand he graciously received it."

"How dreadfully grave papa is looking," continued Dolly, as the carriage rolled along, and the pale but noble face of the Doctor came into view.

He arrived at last. The ponies stopped of their own accord, and from the sound of the Doctor's voice, they all knew that the events of the day had gone well with him whom one of their number loved, and all regarded well.

"These ponies have flown," said he as he stepped from his seat, and said no more.

"Well, papa, you know the ponies have not

yet learned to talk, though it appears they have learned to fly. What is the news ?" inquired Dolly, with that imperiousness which belongs to all sweet intelligences when accompanied with sound health and the beauty of youth.

The Doctor, who had evidently been intently occupied with other things, here gave one arm to Sarah, another to his wife, and said—"Dinner, I suppose, is nearly ready ; so let us go in and prepare ourselves like Britons for our duty, which consists in keeping up a stout heart."

"My heart is quite stout, papa ; and so is Sarah's," observed Dolly, who, according to the custom of her sex, was telling a premeditated lie of the darkest colour.

Brave and stout her heart was in the morning as she saw her father go forth to testify to what he knew of Paul Blanchard. But as the day wore on, she began to ask questions about juries, and the cruelties of lawyers, and what made her feelings more alive to doubt and

fear was the silence of Sarah, who never left the house until half-an-hour before dinner; when Dame Cumberladge, taking her by the hand, led her to the garden which commanded a view of the distant corner of the road round which they saw the carriage turn swiftly. It was then that Sarah's tongue was loosed. She had never doubted, but now she was sure. Not so with Dolly, which was simply the difference between friendship and love.

"Well, my dears," the Doctor began after the soup, "of course you all know that Mr. Blanchard is perfectly innocent of the charge brought against him; and what is more, it is now known who the person is who stole Lord Limethorpe's pocket-book. It has been a very exciting day."

"How did Mr. Blanchard look?" inquired Dolly. "Do, papa, tell us something."

Under this young lady's skilful management, much that passed in the Court was extracted from the Doctor. But of what to him was more

profoundly impressive than aught besides, he said not a word; nor had he decided yet what word he could say of the youthful advocate, who that day had pierced more hearts than one.

At last the Doctor, who was allowed to take his own time on all occasions, and under all circumstances, like a well-obeyed monarch, who loved his subjects more than they loved him, made the startling announcement, that "Mr. Blanchard would not be at the Hermitage that night, but he would come to lunch to-morrow with two gentlemen, a Mr. Birtles, a merchant of Bristol, who was the foster father of the counsel who defended Mr. Blanchard, and the young counsel himself, a very clever man, and remarkably handsome."

After that they all went to bed, but they did not all go to sleep, and those who slept less than any were Doctor Cumberladge and his large-hearted wife.

CHAPTER XIII.

"My blood speaks to you in my veins."
—*Merchant of Venice*, iii. 2.

Paul Blanchard would have started off at once from the Court to the Hermitage, but that he was beset by a crowd of happy human beings who took him prisoner. None of these Masstonites ever doubted his innocence, but they did doubt the uncertainty of the law, or the wiliness of lawyers. As for that fox Serjeant Lawlud, they would have much liked to make him swallow his own head-dress, and hang Messrs. Papcook and Pawkins in their robes. But they were too happy for revenge, and the crowd literally carried Blanchard to Jeavons' shop, where it was arranged that as many as could should sup with him that night at the King's Head.

Paul consented to this for the sake of his friend Jeavons, whose influence among the people spread as rapidly as warmth, and as benignantly. For among the men who should sit down that night to roast beef and beer, were many who had once lost heart, but into whose breasts hope had been poured, and they had girded up their loins for a fight, in which they knew they should come off victors.

Mr. Hugh Arden, after dining alone with Birtles, strolled into the town, intending to amuse himself in his own way, first by going to have a look at St. James's Square and next to visit Jeavons' shop. On his way to the Square he passed by the school where he and Shirley first tasted the rod of discipline. Many of the trivial events of his early life came back to his recollection. But the school front had undergone a vast change: from being a plain, low, unadorned house with a pitched roof of red tiles, and a common doorway, of straight lines, it had become a Gothic

structure with a porch in white stone, very ornamental, but nothing to be proud of; and the young advocate, whistling aloud, perhaps to keep his courage up, made his way to the quiet old Square, where suddenly life for him was deprived of all its brightness and meaning, for a brief space at least. What a change awaited him. The Doctor's house was, as it were, pushed back between two tall houses of great magnificence, which towered above everything and everybody. There was nothing here to bring back his childhood, nothing to make him linger one poor moment on ground which had once been sacred, but had now become as common as a highway. Was it possible that she whom he had once called mother had also changed as much as this? Himself no doubt had changed, and that alone must prepare him for seeing great, perhaps vexatious, changes in those whom he had known when a child. He indulged in some commonplace reflections and moved on. As he did so one or two little

ideas peeped in on his mind, as if just venturing to see how the land lay, and whether they could dare to gain their liberty by scampering out of their place of confinement. But no sooner did these timid little creatures show the tips of their noses than Mr. Hugh Arden stamped his foot, put on a severe frown, and the small and tender things disappeared like squirrels. Both these ideas were intimately connected with a young child who would now be a young lady, and perhaps as much changed as the gaudy grammar school, or the dowdy little brick house now jammed between two blue-granite palaces, sixty feet high.

No one knew him. He recognised one or two old gables, and the tower of the old church, not one of which had changed, but not these nor any living thing exchanged with him any familiar greeting. He reached Jeavons' shop, which was deserted save for the presence of a youth of uncommon intelligence and courtesy.

"Is the master of this shop at home?" inquired Mr. Arden, in a voice which sounded strange to himself.

"No, sir."

"When will he be at home, or where can I see him?"

On which the youth proceeded to inform Mr. Arden of the feast that was then going on at the King's Head, and how his master was there, and Mr. Blanchard, together with a hundred working men at least.

Thither did Arden direct his steps. He wanted to see these working men under the influence of the men who had been their leaders. Is it also likely that his heart was craving for some form of sympathy or some expression of love which his return to Masston had revived, or reawakened, which he thought had long ago been smothered?

On Arden's entering the banqueting room of the King's Head he was received with a burst of cheering, which changed the current of his

thought. He was surprised out of himself. Glad he was not, or if he felt any pleasure, it was derived from the fact that these labouring men had been trained after some sort to work in harmony. He made his way to Blanchard, whom he knew, of course, and at his own request was introduced to Jeavons.

Paul, who had been troubled with an unaccountable coldness of feeling towards Arden, gave up his seat to him, which was next to that of Jeavons, and went and sat between two of the men who were employed at the Oxford Works. Paul, who knew himself to have been innocent of stealing Lord Limethorpe's pocket-book, could not be made to feel any gratitude towards the man who had "got him off." He even resented the young counsel's presence at that moment, and was inclined to treat it as an impertinence. Presently, there was silence. Benjamin Jeavons rose and said that Mr. Arden had begged permission to address them; on which the young barrister stood up

with the rapidity and air of a man who was going to fight, and knew very well how to square himself.

The speech was delivered without gesture but with great clearness. Everybody understood it. It dealt chiefly with the responsibility and the weakness of working men; so long as they could meet together, combine, and work harmoniously for the attainment of some great good, so long would they prosper: in that way would they discharge their duties; only so could they maintain the power and dignity of their order. Here the speaker referred to the social condition of some members of the meeting before they had combined to buy their own provisions at Mr. Jeavons' shop, and the pictures he drew were recognised by many who heard them. He then explained the fuller and more complete result which should be theirs, if they continued to hold together; and finally explained his motives for being there that night, and how he had come to con-

nect himself with a movement, which he declared would change the face of the world.

His words, it should be remembered, were spoken, not in the present day, but at a time when the working-classes had not as yet become the masters of their employers, from whom indeed they suffered much hardship. In expounding the laws of labour as they then stood, Arden vindicated the profession to which he belonged, and made even some hearts warm towards him which had half hated him for being so handsome, and yet being "nothing better than a thief of a lawyer." "You want lawyers," the young advocate proceeded, "and you must have them, to remove bad laws. I was very much astonished the other day to be set right by a bricklayer, a man who couldn't read or write. A number of first-rate bricklayers were taking down the walls of an old house in a street, on which I remarked to a friend of mine that it was a waste of skill to employ these men for such work; for that

common labourers could do it quite as well; on which the bricklayer, who was standing by, remarked, "Yes, and a pretty mess they would make of it; they would first kill somebody who was passing by, and then end in killing theirsens, besides smashing all the bricks to pieces." I saw at once what my instructor meant, and gave him my thanks. It is precisely the same with regard to our laws; there are many which must come down, but we have got to take care how we remove them, or we shall pull them about our ears. Ever since I knew that a skilled bricklayer was required to pull down an old house, I have been proud of being a lawyer; for there is much to be pulled down of man's law before we can build up for ourselves the laws of God, and that pulling down, let me tell you, has to be done with the greatest care, for very great and obvious reasons."

With the music of that voice the dingy room was changed into a hall of gladness, and the

realities of the present, with their struggle for a cruel tyranny, together with their fierce demands and their unrelenting claims, were shown to be mere spectres of the brain, by being connected with a future in which there was to be no caprice; from which all chance was to be abolished, and every disability and restriction and obstruction, which at present dwarfed a man, was to be swallowed up in perfect freedom. "The moment you cease to be working men," were Arden's concluding words, "that moment you seal your doom. Be it to become drunkards, thieves, or aristocrats, the issue will be the same; but continue in the sacred ranks of workers, regulating your labour, perfecting the laws which belong to it, cultivating mercy, understanding justice, and using your strength for the good of the ignorant and the weak, so will you not only make yourselves great, but become immortal."

As the speaker sat down, Paul Blanchard was the first to rise, and immediately the

cheers which followed Hugh Arden's address ceased, and there was a dead silence. No one there present, except Benjamin Jeavons perhaps, had ever heard Blanchard make a speech except when in his cups.

"How quick," he began, "does light travel! I have hated lawyers all my life, and now I hate myself for not knowing better; and what a glory it is for a man to exchange hatred for love! It is like tossing about all night in a hideous dream, in which you are committing murder, and waking up in the bright warm morning, to find yourself an innocent human being."

To Paul's perfect astonishment, his voice gave way, his eyes filled with tears, and the only thing he was equal to, was to break out into a very eloquent smile, and sit down. The impression produced on every heart was too deep for words, and the meeting relapsed into an informal collection of groups of men, all talking of one and the same thing.

It has been dinned into our ears, till some

have been driven mad by the noise, that self-love is the true and only bond of society. Of some kind of society, no doubt this is true, the society, for example, in which Mr. R. W. Warner became a shining ornament. The bond which bound together that night Hugh Arden, Paul Blanchard, and Benjamin Jeavons with a hundred hard-working men of Masston, was the very opposite of self-love, and it led to great events and large enduring consequences.

Another, but much shorter speech, closed a meeting which is still frequently alluded to by many a fireside

"I should not, I think," said Mr. Arden, as he rose to address the men who were all standing up, "I should not be doing right if I left this room without telling you, that I am indebted for the honour and the true happiness of being this night in Masston, and of defending one whom I shall always be proud to call my friend, I mean Mr. Blanchard, I am indebted, I say, for all this to the proprietor of

the Oxford Works. I think it is only fair for you to know this."

The announcement was received in silence, which was broken by Tappit the blacksmith, calling out in a ringing voice, "Three cheers for Mr. Arden!" There then arose a shout which threatened to lift the roof off the King's Head.

The next morning found Birtles, Arden, and Blanchard driving to the Hermitage. Paul knew the way, Birtles drove, and Arden sat silent and dreamy; his chin rested on his chest, and his eyes looked straight on like a sailor's looking through a dark night for rocks ahead, and feeling tolerably sure that no rocks are there except those which some bungling navigator has caused to be pricked on an uncertain chart.

As they came within view of the chapel, Paul caught sight of a figure entering its porch.

"There," said Paul, springing out of the carriage at the risk of his limbs, "is the one

woman"—— The rest of the sentence was lost in the sound of his hurrying feet.

"I wonder how many men there are like that," said Arden, looking after him. "Only one in a thousand would be enough."

"Bless your heart," said Birtles with a wise chuckle, "we all do it. I was just the same with Mrs. B. I remember as if it was yesterday jumping into a carriage just as he jumped out of one."

Arden made no answer, he was thinking of other matters. They arrived at the house; the wide hall door stood open, giving fearless welcome to the day.

The Doctor appeared as the carriage stopped, and received Arden as if he had been his son.

"But where is Blanchard?" he asked.

"In the chapel."

The Doctor smiled, "We shall see him presently no doubt. Come in. Take off your great-coats," said the Doctor in a mellow voice.

They followed him into the breakfast room.

Dame Cumberladge arose and gave both her hands to Hugh, who bent and kissed them.

"My daughter," she said turning to Dolly. Arden flushed and made a hasty step forward; then, with an unaccustomed awkwardness stopped himself midway, and returned Dolly's gracious bow. At the same moment the Doctor's wife turned towards Birtles and Arden, saying simply, "My guardian," introduced him to the woman who had once been to him guardian and mother.

In the midst of this Paul and Sarah came in. The Doctor and his wife exchanged glances, in which there was some apprehension.

"This is Mr. Arden," said Paul; and she put out her hand to him. And so after their long separation, Sarah, not knowing him any more than he knew her, met the boy who she believed was in heaven.

"Where is Shirley?" asked the Doctor, whose state of mind made him long to know that he had a voice.

"He is coming across the lawn," answered Dolly.

"Open the window and let him in."

"He has got the dogs with him."

"Let them come in too; this is a feast-day."

Shirley, trying to calm the dogs' delight at the sight of Blanchard, and at being let into the house, swung in through the open window. He went straight up to Sarah seeing Paul by her side, and said, "Now I can tell you how glad I am that the truth came out."

"This, Shirley," said the Doctor, "is Mr. Arden, who brought it out." As the two men shook hands, a look of perplexity crossed Shirley's face, which the other speedily dispelled by turning to Sarah and saying, "I am glad I knew nothing of you whilst I was defending Mr. Blanchard, for I should have thought less of him than of you."

Sarah's face opened into a smile, and she was about to make some natural answer, when a servant came in to say that luncheon was ready.

Birtles found his tongue, and delighted the company with some account of his own career, in the course of which he more than once had occasion to speak of the master of the Oxford Works.

"I gave," he said amongst other things, "the first great lift to Mr. Warner."

"How was that?" asked the Doctor, and Birtles explained the transaction between Warner and the three B.s, which has been told. "But though it made him, it unmade us," he added with a wilful chuckle, that would have roused the wrath of Mrs. B. if she had heard it.

Sarah, who was engaged in talk with Arden, was at this moment asking if he meant to stay to dinner at the Hermitage.

"No," he answered, "we must return immediately; my time here is short."

"I am sorry," said Sarah, "I may not see you again."

"Mr. Arden," here interposed the Doctor,

"you will stay and dine with us, I hope. You would like, I think, to look over the farm."

"I would like that much," replied Arden, "but I fear I cannot stay to dinner."

"Come," said the Doctor, not unwilling to separate Arden from Sarah, "let us show Mr. Arden our lions, or, to speak accurately, our pigs."

Doctor Cumberladge, unaccustomed to play a part, and unwilling to inflict more pain on his wife, who suffered acutely on account of Hugh Arden, here rose from the table, and left the room with the air of a man who expects everybody to follow. Only the men did so, Dame Cumberladge, Sarah, and Dolly remained like people who, for the first time in their lives, had gone to the play, and who knew nothing of the difference between a drop scene and the green curtain.

Arden discovered for himself that Cumberladge had not made him known to Dolly, and kept himself to himself in speaking

with Shirley; neither Shirley nor Dolly had the least idea who he was, except that he was the deliverer of their friend, and with this thought filling their minds they could entertain none other. Dame Cumberladge, on the other hand, could think of nothing else than that this splendid figure of a man was none other than Sarah's son, and that she, Dame Cumberladge, a daughter of one of the oldest and best families in England, and the wife of one of the poorest of its best men, was standing by, and consenting to the eternal separation of son and mother—and such a mother, and such a son! And all this wrong, and the degrading pain and sorrow which sprang from it, was because Dr. Cumberladge must keep faith with one of the most accursed scoundrels who cannot creep through this world without defiling it.

"How handsome he is!" said Dolly.

"Very!" said Dame Cumberladge with emphasis.

"I must make him a present," said Sarah with much meditation.

"You shall," said the Dame; "we will both give him a present, but he shall think it comes only from you."

She left the room, like one who goes to look at a hidden treasure, or to see that a concealed captive is in safe hiding.

"My mother is always discovering that she has some new jewel," said Dolly.

The lady returned, bringing a gold ring which carried a large ruby, in the centre of which was fixed, with great art, a diamond. "Take this," she said to Sarah, "to Mr. Arden, and ask him to wear it for your sake; you may say that I asked you to place it on his hand."

This was to be secret between the three women — very harmless in itself, as they thought. But it may be safely affirmed, that in this age of enlightenment it is absolutely impossible for a secret to become other than a

very dangerous thing, however sweet and innocent it may be when born.

Sarah proceeded to the garden, looking intently at the beautiful jewel she was to place on the finger of her son. He and Paul were standing in front of the chapel porch. Sarah, taking Paul's arm, said to Arden—

"Will you let me make you a present, which I should like you to keep for my sake? Mrs. Cumberladge told me to say that she would like me to place it on your finger."

This little ceremony was performed with much simplicity. Sarah placed the ring on the outstretched finger of a hand which, till then, had not been deemed suitable for carrying a ring. When this was done, she clasped Paul's arm with both hands, looking at the ring, and the hand to which it had passed.

Arden who, although a lawyer, was too young to be insensible to all the courtesies of common humanity, looked at the ring with increasing astonishment; then kissed it, then

looked at Sarah as if he would have wished also to kiss her; but instead thereof said—

"I will always wear this ring for your sake and the lady's sake who told you to place it here," and he kissed it again, and that was the end of the ceremony.

The Doctor, Birtles, and Shirley were on the other side of the chapel.

"Mr. Birtles," said the Doctor, "you can do me a favour," and taking Birtles aside, explained to the brisk little man how that he had more than five thousand pounds, which belonged to "our boy," as he called Hugh Arden. "But," continued the Doctor, "there is this condition attached to it; he must never know from whom it comes. Had he remained with us, there would have been no difficulty; but that is past and gone."

"Then," said Birtles, leaping to a conclusion, "you know his parents?"

"I do; and that is precisely the secret which I must reveal to no one."

"Five thousand pounds!" mused Birtles; "I think he would rather know who his father and mother were, than take those five thousand pounds."

"That," said the Doctor, "must not be thought of, as far as I am concerned. I am bound by my own promise; and, besides that, it would profit him less than nothing to know. The truth was hid from him by me at first, and I must hide it from him still; that is the penalty I pay for usurping a power which did not belong to me."

The Doctor spoke with so much repentance in his voice and aspect, that Birtles only answered—

"Is there anybody to be hurt by the discovery?"

"There are good and bad people mixed up in this matter."

"And you can't separate them? Well, it's always so. If it weren't for some of the good

people in this world, the bad would never have a chance."

"Yes," said the Doctor meditatively; "the good people are the fair garden walls, along which the villains creep to their work."

"Well, Doctor," said Birtles, "I will undertake to convey the money to Hugh."

And upon that conclusion they returned to the house, which Birtles and Hugh soon left, to take their way back to Masston.

CHAPTER XIV.

"How quickly nature falls into revolt
When gold becomes her object!"
—*Second Part of Henry IV.*, iv. 4.

WARNER meanwhile had found no rest amid the tempest which his own incantations had called up to tear and buffet him. Whilst he was still thinking of the impending danger which he dreaded, he knew not why, from his unacknowledged son, a letter reached him with the Paris postmark, demanding in peremptory terms the immediate payment of five thousand pounds, together with a bond for the future payment of certain moneys found to be due from Robert Warner to Lord Francis Elbston. The solicitor who had written the letter observed that his client's conditions were unusually lenient, as he felt that he himself had been

guilty of some negligence in not making earlier inquiry into these matters. He trusted that Mr. Warner would not delay to set right the results of the negligence that had existed on his side.

Warner received this letter at the Oxford Works, and when he had read it, went out to his carriage, which was waiting for orders, and drove straight to Battwood's Bank. There he had a private interview with the manager, from which he came out with a sullen and menacing look. He had convinced himself that his creditors had had their confidence in him shaken, and his hurrying mind, unable to discover a way out of his difficulties, was busy with their probable effects. At other times a sudden demand made on Warner for five thousand pounds would have been answered by a cheque or bill sent with a letter by a clerk. But now the storm-tide had reached his feet, and there was nothing behind him but a helpless cliff. He sat gloomily debating with himself whether

he should at all risks raise the money immediately required, and wait for the chance of the apparently inevitable crash being prevented; and wished vainly that he had not, like a fearful patient hiding symptoms from his doctor, concealed the true state of his affairs from his confidential lawyer. He had just resolved to send for this confessor when Dr. Cumberladge was announced.

A change had passed over both Warner and the Doctor since they had last met. The one had grown hard in the shell of his wrong-doing; the other had learned his own frailty, and the sorrow which he got from the learning made him pitiful even to the most knavish of his race. He greeted Warner with less acerbity than on the occasion of their former interview. But the gentleness of his bearing was soon changed by the question which Warner immediately put to him, in a snarling tone—

"How do you know that Mr. Hugh Arden is my son?"

"Just as I know you to be Mr. Robert Welsher Warner; just as I know Sarah Armstrong, whom you tried to destroy, to be his mother; just as I know you to be filled with the knowledge that he is your son. Do you doubt it?" said the Doctor in a tone of command.

Warner quailed for a moment, but recovered himself quickly, and said, with a dry emphasis—

"There are certain transactions between us two, which I do not wish to render more unpleasant than they need be."

"Unpleasant!" cried the Doctor carried away with just wrath.

"That was my word," replied Warner. "Pray listen to what I am going to say. When you visited me here more than twenty years ago, I offered no objection to the claim which you then made for the support of a certain child. I make that objection now, and dare you to do your worst."

Warner spoke thus, having found suddenly his old fertility of resource, and calculated in a moment upon all the reasons which must prevent the Doctor from taking any open action against him. The Doctor was overwhelmed with the cool, long-headed audacity which Warner displayed. He sat as one dumb, thus giving Warner time to improve his position.

"Mr. Blanchard," continued the merchant in measured tones, "whom I had the pleasure of advancing in the world, and in whom I am therefore interested, is, I learn, engaged to marry—your friend. An attempt to prove that Mr. Hugh Arden's parentage is what you assert it to be, might have a disagreeable effect upon your plans."

Warner, having delivered this thrust at the Doctor, gratified himself with the reflection that Dr. Cumberladge was too high-minded to have allowed Paul Blanchard to become engaged to Sarah Armstrong without telling him something of her early life, and that this information must

have been conveyed without compromising Mr. Robert Warner. Intoxicated with his own cruelty, he watched the Doctor's evident distress, and smilingly asked him what was, in fact, the object of his visit.

The Doctor stood up as though grown young again with anger, and said—

"My object in coming to you was friendly. It is now to give back to you the sum of five thousand pounds which I have kept for the maintenance of the son whom you disown."

So saying Dr. Cumberladge felt in his pocket for the draft he had prepared for Birtles, which, on the impulse of the moment, he was about to restore in reckless contempt to the original donor of the money.

"Five thousand pounds!" cried Warner, in a strangely eager tone; and then, again bringing his swift power of reflection to his aid, and stopping the Doctor with a dignified gesture, said—

"No, that cannot be; I will not take back what I gave freely."

"Gave! for what purpose, pray, did you give it?"

"I gave it in charity to an object of your care."

"Then take it back, for there is no charity in it."

And with that the Doctor flung down the cheque on Warner's table, and walked out of the room.

Warner, left alone, started to his feet with upstretched hands. Once more the powers that ruled his fate had decided for his success. Five thousand pounds, which Dr. Cumberladge had forced upon him against his will, was precisely the sum required to satisfy his present need. As he stood in an attitude expressive of ecstatic gratitude, the door slowly opened, and Edith came into the room. Just so had she come in when she first saw Robert Warner, just so had she found him full of a devout

delight. But then the door had seemed to her to open by some beauteous magic; now, she knew it to be a mere trick. And just as the glamour had faded from the once mysterious approach to Warner's sanctuary, so had the majesty of pious fervour, which once filled her with reverence, passed away from his aspect. She saw in him nothing but a man proud in his own success; he saw in her nothing but a woman, who might find him out. Both remembered how they had thus met before, and both longed to forget it.

Edith was the first to speak.

"Where have you been all this time?" she coolly asked.

"Engaged on business. I have but one note to write, and I will come home with you."

He sat down at his writing-table, and unfolded the cheque which the Doctor had left, intending to enclose it to Lord Francis. As he looked at it, and saw that it was payable

to James Birtles or order, his expression changed; his eyes opened wide, and his mouth grew set.

"What—what—can *he* have to do with it?" he said, forgetting his wife's presence. And she, attentively regarding him, saw how deeply troubled he was, and still longed to help him. This she might have done, and would have done had he asked her; but he got up, and making some hurried and confused explanation to her, went out of the room, and, with the cheque still in his hand, went for the second time to the bank, and, as was his custom, walked straight to the manager's room.

"This cheque," he said, "has by some inadvertence been made out in the wrong name. It should be payable to me. Will you kindly communicate with Dr. Cumberladge on the matter?"

The manager replied that it should be attended to, and Warner took the occasion of

leaving the room with some air of offended dignity. He then returned to the works, wrote instructions to Lord Francis's solicitor to draw on him at sight for five thousand pounds, and was then ready to go home with Edith, whom he found sitting patiently where he had left her. As they drove towards Baston, Edith said to her husband—

"Are you troubled about anything?"

As a matter of fact, Warner was troubled with wondering what was the reason for the Doctor's cheque being made payable to Birtles, and whether James Reklaw would be arrested, and what, in that case, he might confess. Was it possible, he asked himself, that from the scamp Ruckles had been extracted anything which might supply a definite charge as to the Australian transaction, and that the Doctor's proceeding had been a deliberate insult? And the result of his self-questioning was that he found himself completely vanquished by Dr.

Cumberladge. The true explanation, which was that the Doctor had become forgetful in his wrath, he never entertained.

In answer to his wife, he said that he was not troubled, only tired.

"Who do you think," she went on with new animation, "strolled towards our grounds to-day, as Julia and I were going out?"

"I cannot guess. Not Lord Francis again?"

"No; some one more interesting to me. Mr. Hugh Arden."

"Did he go to see you?"

"No."

"Did he—come to see me?"

"No. It was a chance meeting. I asked him to come in, and we turned back with him. I have never seen Julia take such a liking to any one."

Edith would have said much more, some days before, on the subject which occupied her completely, but she had lost all will and

power to communicate her real thoughts to the man who had become to her a shadow: and the fact of her saying anything at all about Mr. Arden was due to a feverish desire to break silence, and an inability to talk of anything else.

Warner, however, made no answer to her implied praises of Arden.

"You are not sorry that he won the case?" she asked.

"How could I be?"

Warner answered with a smile, but there was something in his tone which prevented Edith from asking any more questions.

While these two were going from the Oxford Works to Baston Hall, Dr. Cumberladge had been to see Birtles at his hotel, and, still hot with passion, told him that Hugh's father had disowned him, and that he had in consequence given over to him the cheque for five thousand pounds, which he had written out for Birtles.

"For me!" said Birtles coolly, "then there's time to stop it."

"Stop it!" cried the Doctor aghast, "you think I was wrong?"

"Certainly. You would not deprive the boy of the money, because his father is a rogue."

"I am superstitious enough to think that wealth got by vileness will carry vileness with it wherever it goes. I thought that while I could punish this man, by keeping a rod hanging over him, I was right to take his money for the boy. But when he laughed at threats, and even denied my power to expose him, I could not help flinging the money in his face, and laughing at him, as a thing too contemptible for hatred."

"That may be," said Birtles, "but five thousand pounds is five thousand pounds—and a very tidy sum for a young man to get as a present when he's starting in life. You say

the cheque was payable to my order. He can't cash it unless you alter it, or unless he gets my endorsement."

"Five thousand pounds," said the Doctor, "is no doubt a very nice thing, if the pounds are clean; but if every one of them is smeared and dirty"——

"Wash 'em," said Birtles.

"There is some money you can no more wash clean, than they could the thirty pieces of silver," replied the Doctor. But nevertheless he was overcome by Birtles' arguments, and thus it happened that in the course of the evening, Warner received an intimation that the cheque he had left with Messrs. Battwood was correctly written, and would be paid to the order of Mr. Birtles. Just as Warner, in his own room, sat muttering curses on himself for the blunders he had made, the Rev. Wm. Gadso and the Rev. Edward Sweetapple arrived at the Hall. Edith received Mr. Gadso with her

usual kindness, and Julia received Mr. Sweetapple with more than her usual indifference.

"How are all the birds?" asked Mr. Sweetapple blandly.

"The parrot is more snappish than ever," said Julia.

Mr. Sweetapple looked at his finger.

"I forgave him long ago," he said with intolerable sweetness.

"I have never forgiven you for being bitten," said Julia with admirable gravity.

Mr. Sweetapple, not quite sure of Julia's meaning, and being now very desirous of ascertaining if the next step he took would land him on firmer ground, as his mother had assured him it would, said gently—

"Your bird might bite me as often as he liked."

"I don't think he would like it very often," said Julia meditatively. Mr. Sweetapple upon this was silent for a while.

At this moment Mr. Gadso, who had been talking church matters with Edith, said with a smile,—

"And your dear husband? I would like to communicate with him on certain temporal matters."

"You will, I think, find him in his room."

Accordingly Mr. Gadso went to Robert Warner, whom he found drinking old sherry in gloomy solitude, and who received Mr. Gadso as if he were the fiend come to fetch him.

"Have some sherry?" said Warner with truculent hospitality.

Mr. Gadso stared, but none the less accepted the sherry.

"What is this I hear?" he said softly, as he poured out the gold wine.

"What about?" inquired Warner in a hoarse dull voice.

Mr. Gadso stared again.

"What about, I say?" repeated Warner impatiently.

"I think," replied Gadso in evident alarm, "that I had better see you to-morrow at the works."

"No," said Warner, placing himself with some cunning between Gadso and the door; "to-morrow I may be—away. Pray tell me, dear friend and master," he went on with an exaggeration of his old manner, "what is it you have heard?"

"Oh!" answered Gadso reassured, "it is nothing, no doubt; but my brother creditors asked me to get your authority for muzzling certain rumours that seem to touch your credit, and," he added with solemnity, "your honour."

"Aha!" said Warner, returning to his fierce manner, "did I not stop old Ephraim's mouth? Tell your brothers, my creditors, that you and they can have their money whenever they like. Have some more sherry?"

Mr. Gadso, who had not yet tasted his first glass, thought it expedient to bow with much

courtesy, and to keep to himself his opinion, that if Mr. Warner's statement had been true, his manner of making it would have been different.

"It will be my pleasure to tell them so," he replied to Warner, "and now I will wish you good-night. God bless you!"

"Stop! Have another glass," said Warner.

This was, perhaps, the greatest trial in the whole of Mr. Gadso's clerical career, but he bore it manfully, and bowed himself out of the room, to rejoin his young friend and pupil.

Mr. Sweetapple was almost as much discomfited as his master, but for a very different reason. He had managed to get into a quiet corner on some pretence with Julia, and when there, had said to her in a distressing whisper—

"Julia!"

"Mr. Sweetapple!" Julia had replied in a clear tone, which filled him with terror.

"May I not hope?" he babbled.

"To be bitten again?" said Julia quickly. "You can go and try."

And with that she walked away, leaving Mr. Sweetapple convinced that his mother's perception was for once at fault. His mother, however, when he somewhat lugubriously conveyed to her his sense of rejection, bore the disappointment with singular fortitude.

"*Pauvre petit*," she said, "*c'est un coup manqué*. Well, you will try again somewhere else. Julia would have done very nicely, but that Warner fellow is no better than he should be. He's a pack of lies, that you may take my word for."

"My dear Edward," said Mr. Gadso as they left Baston Hall together, "a very distressing circumstance has befallen me; I am greatly troubled."

"So am I," said the pupil.

This was quite true; and of these two help-

less men, smarting with ignoble sorrow, neither could comfort the other; indeed, their companionship might have been taken as a type of the parable often expounded with much rhetoric by each of them, of the blind leading the blind. They could neither see the ditch yawning before them, nor point it out to others.

CHAPTER XV.

" Some there be that shadows kiss ;
Such have but a shadow's bliss :
There be fools alive, I wis,
Silver'd o'er : and so was this."
—*Merchant of Venice*, ii. 9.

The next morning Mr. Robert Warner got up with a consciousness of having something weighty on his mind, which hurried him into a feverish activity. He felt, for almost the first time in his life, the tyranny of doing ill by stealth, and blushing to find it infamous. He had a vague recollection of having played some practical joke on Mr. Gadso ; and remembering this, he was filled with an irritation strange to his nature, which was only dispelled by his reading a letter, sent to him by the new foreman at the Oxford Works, who wrote—

"HONOURED SIR,—The experiment promises well. The process is certain. We shall make the first trial very early.—I remain, honoured sir, yours obediently,

"ADAM COATHAM."

"There are thousands in this!" cried Warner in trumph. "When it is once set going, Lord Francis and the creditors will be hat in hand to me again. The bank, too, will be glad enough to wait. They can't afford to throw me over for five thousand. As for Reklaw—and Mr. Arden—I shall find means to stave off danger from them."

He dressed himself, rang his bell, ordered breakfast and the carriage at once, and left his home without a thought for any one in it. Arrived at the works he went straight to the laboratory.

"We are quite ready, sir," said Coatham, bustling importantly forward to meet him.

"Come, then," said Warner, taking up his

place on a broad plank stretching across a large vat, containing a mess of deadly poison, and one of the precious metals in solution, "let us begin."

Coatham also took up his place by the side of an eager-faced Frenchman, in a blue blouse stained here and there with chemicals, near whom stood three or four workmen waiting silently for orders. Coatham took up a large copper vase of an Etruscan shape, fastened to it a copper wire, then attached it to the end of the vat where Warner stood, and let it slowly descend into the tank of dark liquor. Warner stooped and looked anxiously into the turbid bath of liquid metal.

"Take care, sir," cried Coatham, now supporting his wire with the bent end of a stick, and then, looking like a fisherman who has hooked a big fish, said—

"Draw up, sir, and see what has happened," and handed the cane to Warner.

Warner took the cane in his hand, and was

drawing up its glistening load, when he saw Mr. Hugh Arden appear at the other end of the laboratory; and that sight was his damnation. A nameless terror seized him; he felt that all his dreams of evil were come true, he saw his son advancing upon him like an avenging angel; and, in the very moment of triumph, when his star was piercing the black clouds that threatened him, he quailed; dimness seized his eyes, a hurrying giddiness swayed his limbs, and while, true to his instincts of gain, he clung to the vase, heavy with the liquid that filled it, he reeled, and fell into the dead sea of silver.

It might seem to the rapid eye of readers, that this tank was made on purpose to drown Mr. Robert Welsher Warner. This is not the case. It was constructed at great expense and trouble, to hold a set of bed-posts made of copper, which were to rise from their precious bath, transfigured into silver columns for an Eastern monarch. Other marvels were in

preparation: such as a Corinthian column, twelve feet high, also of silver, the base and capital of which were to be of gold, intended to support the plumed branches of a palm, also in silver, which in their turn were to carry a hundred crystal lamps to light up a marble palace, which, though vacant at present, may still be seen on the banks of the Lower Nile.

"Well, he died in harness," said the Rev. William Gadso when, conveying the awful tidings to Edith, he tried also to comfort her.

"He died in a tub of poison," said Dr. Cumberladge.

"He died by accident," said a jury.

"It was a very sudden fall," observed one Masstonite to another, and then it occurred to every one that Mr. Robert Warner had risen very suddenly.

"Yes, he had a very sudden rise," remarked a heavy commercial man to another commercial man who shook his head, and said, "That explains everything." No doubt it ex-

plained much ; a rapid walk up the spiral staircase of a lofty tower, has very frequently ended in a far more rapid coming down than the climber expected, which was entirely owing to the "sudden rise."

The impression left on Hugh Arden was that Warner deliberately plunged into the vat, and knew what he was doing at the time.

"I saw him," he related to Birtles an hour afterwards, "look straight at me as I walked up to him, and his face in one moment seemed to become a canker'd heap of strange achieved gold, cracked all over, wrinkled with care, horror, and, I was going to say, damnation. I once saw a man whom I defended—but who, nevertheless, was condemned to be hanged—leave the dock with the same look on his face."

"A very sudden death then," mused Birtles.

"No doubt, that was the best part of it," said Hugh. "When are you going home ?"

"I am quite ready," said Birtles, "except that I have to collect five thousand pounds."

"How long will that take?"

"Just ten minutes."

"Then we will dine at three, and take the 'Tally Ho' at five."

Edith and Julia went in the same coach—not on the same day, but many days later, and, for many a day after Edith wore a long black cloak; and when again she rose into the day of the world, it was within the walls of a house made gray with incense, and speckled with men in black gowns, and women with white linen flaps to their faces. She did much good among the poor. She was persecuted for her charities by some men of the very religious "school of thought," whom her dead husband had helped to make insolent. She became happy and joyous, for her courage was restored to her, and, in fighting mean men, who wielded nothing but dead laws, she found not a little knowledge mixed with delightful humour.

Julia took to horses, and said they were better companions than men. She hunted, to

the inexpressible grief of the Bishop, but she softened him a little by giving up dancing. She never allowed a morning to pass without seeing Edith, and every day the two sisters quarrelled like lovers, and gave wounds to each other for the pleasure they had in healing them, To-day it was a cambric cap for Edith, made in shape like a coronet, to take the place of what Julia would call grave clothes about her sister's face; and another day's fearful struggle would be about Julia's rings, and the glittering jewels she wore, which the elder sister said should be sold and bestowed on the poor, on which Julia would laugh, and presently sing some old song of days when men were knights and women ladies. The sweetness of her voice always brought a calm, when Julia would return to the argument, for the sole purpose of keeping up some natural activity.

"If I sold these emeralds, Mrs. Bashak would get them, and wear them, and then there would be envy and malice on the part of Mrs.

Jehoshaphat. Whilst I wear them they are the cause of no envy, but rather of pleasure. Do you know that the other day, as I was patting my black horse Monostatos on the neck, I caught sight of my ungloved hand with these same rings on, as it touched his shining coat. And since then I have been thinking how best I can manage to make him wear my jewels, they are so lovely when seen in motion."

This harmless extravagance, and playful revelling in fancy, always made Edith smile, and for one of these sweet messengers of love, Julia would give up everything—till the next day.

The immediate claims of Lord Francis were paid in full without question by Edith, whose fortune, it must be said to Warner's credit, he had never touched. The creditors found that, with time and a trustworthy manager for the Oxford Works, who was found in the person of Paul Blanchard, they could not only recompense themselves, but could gain much profit. Lord

Francis, on the death of Lord Limethorpe, returned to Elbston in company with Mr. Buckle. The career of the two was not unlike that of a well-known Spanish scoundrel and his valet; and when Lord Francis had spent all his money, he disappeared as suddenly as did that magnificent, musical Don, but whither he went is not so certain.

Did a wedding take place in the chapel of the knights at the Hermitage Farm? or did Sarah Armstrong convince Paul Blanchard of the impossibility of such a wedding taking place? Did her vivid mind discover that there could be no Eden without its garden? It is not unlikely. But we may be sure of this, that whatever choice she made, it was determined less by the consideration she had for herself than for others.

Did Dr. Cumberladge come to see the error of his ways, and bring back from heaven the boy he had sent there, restored in the form of a man to the mother he had robbed?

These, and many other questions of equal interest growing out of this piece of human patchwork, which the rapid changes of these modern times have produced, may be left to the ingenuity of our readers, and especially those of them who know how to distinguish between Masston brass and unminted gold.

There remains but little more to tell. The Oxford Works retain their fame, but under the wise rule of their present director they have been outstript in show and magnificence, not only in Masston, but in many other English towns.

The roads and lanes which once came up to Masston, where grew trees in lofty avenues, that seemed to have been planted and trained to stateliness and grandeur, by a people who appreciated those qualities too highly to allow them to become the properties of mortals whose staying powers were of the feeblest kind, have given way, and gone. The hawthorns and hollies which stood between Masston and the villages of Russet, Averil, and Leasows,

like the sentinels of an army bent on defending the shapely fields from a surprise which would turn them into clay-pits, gravel-pits, or water-holes, have perished, and so have the birds which sheltered in their branches. The villages have gone the way of the tall trees and the avenues, the fields are smothered with houses, and the houses are smothered with human beings, and the human beings are smothered with a malignant fever called debt. Not one single member of the human race in that great town could possibly mistake a windmill for a giant, an inn for a castle, or a baggage for a fair lady. They know better, but it may be said without fear, that great as is the knowledge of the famous people of Masston, they know not everything. As, however, they have most certainly found out new lively and picturesque methods of making money, they will, it may be fairly presumed, continue to maintain their name and race among the moderns as long as the youngest of their kind.

The Pudding Bag is now pulled down, and the rookeries, as they were called, are abolished; and there be some who declare that the new national livery of brown and yellow, bestowed on their inhabitants in requital of giving up their right to live as they wish, has not proved so far a success.

This is a pity.

Benjamin Jeavons still lives, and has lived long enough, he says, since, having seen the decay of the two forces which once could sway the hearts of men, he has nothing to do now but see men grow rich, or well off, and die like flies who have eaten poisoned sugar.

The general dulness in our town is ascribed by many tongues to many and different causes: the one which chiefly caught our ear, and was deemed worthy of notice, was that given by a charming young lady whom we have all seen and doubtless admired, who said that Masston was dull because it had no new books worth reading.

On that hint we set to work to write something about the town itself, and some of the people who have helped to make it what it is; and to put into such shape our thoughts and feelings as might command the attention of Masston itself, and lead it, in the pathetic and loving words once addressed by a man who followed the plough to the devil, to—

"Tak' a thocht, and men'."

And this story is respectfully dedicated to the academicians of Masston, its pastors and masters, its wise men and its fair women.

THE END.

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